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CHattel OR WIFE?

BY

CLAUDE BRAY



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"She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house -
My household stuff, my field, my barn,
My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything."
(Taming of the Shrew, iii.)

"Wives are sold by fate."—
(Merrie Wives of Windsor, ii.)

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CHATTEL OR WIFE?

CHAPTER I.

"THIS," said the parson, "is my favourite view of York."

"Which?" asked the Colonel, who, being perched high on the wall between the old and the new stations of the North-Eastern Railway Company, was more interested by them than by any distant objects. "I can see nothing exceptionally beautiful in such a particularly modern institution as a line of rails."

"You are not looking in the right direction, Frank," replied his companion, "though allow me to remark *en passant* that these strong contrasts, the old and new stations—the mediæval city wall cut by a modern railroad—are truly characteristic of this dear old town. But I want you to look ahead. Could there be anything more striking than the river yonder lined with its monuments of a too neglected past? See to the extreme left there that old water-tower at the end of the wall built to protect St. Mary's Abbey from the turbulence of the citizens, and close by it the *hospitium*, now fitly used as a storehouse

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for Roman antiquities, beyond which there peep through the trees the graceful ruins of the Abbey itself. And then the Yorkshire Philosophical Society's buildings, close to which is the multi-angular tower, the lower part of which is genuine Roman masonry. Next you can see St. Leonard's Hospital, with the Minster—peerless this last, as even you must admit—standing as a background, while to the right, behind that tall building, you can just see the corner of the Guildhall showing——”

“I wish that I had your enthusiasm, Jack,” said his friend, interrupting the rapid flow of the description, “but I am afraid that I can only agree with you upon one point. The old and the new here are distinctly what one might call a blend, spoiling, as in the case of most blends, both the ingredients. What is that ugly building doing between a Norman abbey and a Roman wall? Who put that ornate tower of a church or something straight in a line with the minster? And as for your Guildhall to the right, I must freely confess that that extremely offensive-looking (though doubtless useful) erection between us and the river would have prevented my noticing anything else in its neighbourhood to which my attention was not specially drawn. But don't let me interrupt you. Pray, go on.”

The parson laughed, but did not immediately accept the challenge, and the pair stood for some moments silently scanning the view. Under the clergyman's guidance the soldier was by way of seeing all that there was to be seen, and they had just walked along the city wall from Micklegate Bar. They were a

good-looking couple, both men being in the prime of life—between five-and-thirty and forty, in fact—the parson dark, olive-complexioned, clean-shaved, with a handsome aristocratic face, and the soldier fair, erect, with a ruddy countenance tanned to a deep red brown by something stronger than an English sun. Though they showed little family likeness, they were cousins, and had been chums and schoolfellows—hardly out of each other's sight, in fact—for the first twenty years of their several existences. Of late, it is true, they had been borne apart by widely separated careers, which had left the first-named waging war against ignorance and vice in a squalid east-end parish, and taken his companion to fight mere earthly battles in distant India. But their affection for each other had survived their separation, and had brought the soldier flying home on the shortest of leave to see his cousin over a notable crisis in his life. They had spent a week together at Harrogate, and were taking York on their way back to Town at the earnest solicitation of the parson, who was anxious to personally introduce the Colonel to the historic city, which he himself admired more than any other in their native land.

"Perhaps, Jack," said Colonel Eustace presently, "you would wish to offer a few remarks on this bunting, of which there is so liberal a display?"

"That," replied John Strachey, with a smile, "I am bound to confess I could have dispensed with."

His companion tugged disconsolately at his long, fair moustache.

"It is too bad, Jack," he said grumpily; "it is indeed. I can quite follow your ideas about the

mingling of old and new, but I submit that there is a limit to all things. Of course we are getting case-hardened to having new fads superseding time-honoured notions, but this is altogether too much. And, I may add, it is just my luck to find the place *decorated*—save the mark!—by municipal vandals for modern middle-class festivities.”

For on the following day a great personage was expected to grace some civic function, and the grand old city was flying bunting from end to end. The parson pretended not to notice the ill-humour—tried to laugh it off, in fact.

“Grumbling again, Frank,” was all he said.

“And who would not grumble?” retorted the soldier. “Why, to hear Englishmen talk out in the East—to listen to them railing at the besetting tawdriness of our Aryan brother—you would think that we had no ‘sins of our own in this respect. But, upon my word, after such an object lesson as this I shall say that we ourselves are every whit as bad as the mild Hindu.”

“I am surprised to hear a soldier, of all people in the world, finding fault with what is, after all, only a spontaneous exhibition of loyalty.”

“I don’t object to the loyalty—far from it. One does not see too much of it nowadays. It is the style of decoration that I draw the line at.”

“And what would you suggest as an alternative?” asked the other.

The Colonel laughed grimly.

“There is only one style of decoration suited to the walls of York,” he said. “I would suggest the heads

(on spikes) of the committee which has permitted these grand old mediæval monuments to be disfigured by the tawdry bunting of the middle-class nineteenth-century decorating contractor."

"You are very savage, Frank."

"And I have every right to be," came the answer short and sharp. "I have come to see York—to get a whiff of dear old mediæval England before I return to the garish East, and I find the whole place ruined and disguised in a manner which would disgrace a third-class up-country rajah. Come away, Jack. Let us get some lunch before the train starts."

"Won't you go across to see the Minster, or the Museum, or the Guildhall, or anything?"

"No. I'll go by the 12.40 instead of two hours later, and take me back to clubland, which is, at all events, honest in its newness, and not an exaggerated humbug like York disguised as a country fair. Come along."

The Reverend John Strachey knew his York by heart, and, sorry as he was that his cousin should miss the opportunity of seeing the city, he felt, for his own part, that the Colonel was wise in his determination to go no further that day. The pair, as already mentioned, had been spending a parson's holiday at Harrogate, and had taken York on their way back, partly because, as the soldier put it, they wished to avoid having the taste of the Yorkshire moors spoiled by a view of Leeds and its smoky satellites, and partly because the Colonel wanted to see a place of which he had heard so much, but had never hitherto been able to visit. Unluckily, Colonel Eustace, though

a thoroughly good fellow, was in a measure the spoiled child of fortune, and besides, being accustomed to have his own way, was apt to take strong likes and dislikes.

On arriving early in the day they had first strolled up to Micklegate Bar, and the full enormity of the Town Council's offence had not burst upon him till they were returning along the walls. Then he had forthwith taken it into his stubborn head that this was not a propitious day for seeing York. He had come to the place full of ideas of Roman Britain and of the Middle Ages, and he speedily made up his mind that Micklegate Bar, with its suggestions of the days when there were blackening upon it the heads of the Yorkists slain at Wakefield, was all that this detestable bunting would allow him to see.

As they strolled across to the modern station close by, the *cicerone* had not the heart even to suggest that the spot on which they stood was hallowed ground, and that, in the course of the railway works fifteen years before, when the station was being erected on the site of what had once been the Roman burial ground some sixteen centuries earlier, many unique monuments of Roman Britain had been brought to light. Indeed, the Colonel was still in a carping mood and not inclined to listen to any one.

"Old and new — old and new," he remarked savagely. "That is what confronts one at every turn. What was good enough for our forefathers won't do for us. We must strike out something new for ourselves, and we are going ahead at a rate which must ruin us, if men, women, and children — the

women particularly—insist much longer on combining to prove that whatever is, is wrong.”

John Strachey had his private reasons for feeling the sting of this last remark.

“I should have expected, Frank, that even a staunch Conservative like you would have had some sympathy with modern progress,” he said.

“It does not exist—it is all revolution tending to anarchy, and the aimless reversal of everything that I (and a good many others) believe to be right.”

“Because you were taught it by those who knew no better.”

“No, Jack. Say ‘because we were content to put the experience of ages and the wisdom of our forefathers before the theories of the modern destroyer red-hot from some seething pot he is pleased to call a forge.’ These people remind me of a child which pulls a handsome doll to pieces, and takes more pleasure in seeing the sawdust run out than in the beauty of the finished whole. Come, we have just half an hour for lunch.”

CHAPTER II.

TRAVELLING by an earlier train was not without its advantages. Our pair of friends shared a compartment (third class) and had it to themselves, which they could not have hoped to do in the crowded "Scotsman" which was running just two hours behind them. But, in spite of this advantage, they were past Doncaster before the Colonel's equanimity reasserted itself. Up to that point he had retired into a corner of the carriage with a paper, which he was merely pretending to read, and his cousin had done the same. But at last the former threw down his *Morning Post* and looked across at John Strachey, who by this time was staring somewhat disconsolately out of the window without taking much notice of what there was to be seen. Eustace felt that it was his duty to apologise for his late outburst of ill-temper.

"I wish," he began, "that I was as easy-going as you are, Jack, and as hard to upset. I am afraid I spoiled your visit to York for you to-day."

The parson, whose thoughts were in truth far away, came down from the clouds and landed on *terra firma* with something like a start. He had been in the

"Perhaps it would be better to say that it is not every one who will be content with something short of his ideal, or" (correcting himself) "who—that is to say, I should be the last to hint that Maude is anything but a very clever and accomplished woman. What I wanted to express was that in this world it is idle to expect perfection, and that we ought to be content with what we can get."

"It is the first time, Jack, that I have ever heard you suggest that Miss Ashley was anything but perfection."

"Don't misunderstand me, Frank. Maude is in my eyes perfection both in mind and body, but——"

He paused suddenly and looked dreamily out of the window again, while his cousin, who had forgotten all about his own woes, sat watching him; so there was silence in the carriage for a minute or so.

"Go on, Jack," said Colonel Eustace presently.

The other started. For once again he had allowed his mind to wander, and to fill itself with those misgivings which so often beset a man once his wedding day is fixed. He hesitated, too, before he answered, although the man beside him was his most intimate friend, his all-but brother. And when at last he did frame a reply, he took refuge in the old Scotch habit of answering one question by another.

"You have not seen much of Maude?" he asked.

"Very little," replied the Colonel promptly; "you know that though Miss Ashley has been in a way the cause of my hasty run home, my time has been so fully taken up that I have had very little opportunity of improving our acquaintance, as I should like to

do," he added by way of a polite after-thought. He was alluding to the fact that his cousin's marriage was the cause of his coming home on ninety days' leave.

"True. I had forgotten," answered John Strachey. "Now, Frank, I am going to put your friendship to the test. Tell me candidly what you think of my future wife?"

The Colonel laughed.

"Jack, your brain is getting weakened under all this excitement," he said. "Even supposing that I had had an opportunity of forming an opinion about Miss Ashley, which I have not, let me remind you that it would be absurd for me to try to answer your question. If I represent the lady as all that is adorable, you will not believe in my sincerity; if I 'damn her with faint praise,' you will imagine that I mean far worse than I say; and if I dared to tell you that she was not all I should look for in my own wife, you would never forgive me."

There was just enough stress on the personal pronoun "my" to make it sound to the jealous ears of the other as if it were really the indication of the Colonel's actual views on his cousin's choice. John Strachey caught at the idea on the instant.

"What fault have you to find with Maude?" he asked.

"There," cried the Colonel triumphantly, "just see how right I was. I never insinuated any such thing, and yet you suggest on the instant that I must necessarily be inclined to find fault."

"I wish I could get you to speak out, Frank. I

feel certain that you are keeping something back. Out with it like a man."

"You mistake me," replied his cousin. "So far from keeping anything back, I have no opinion to give. Come, Jack, if you want my confidence, give me a little of yours. By all the rules of the game the attack in this instance lies with you. Do you tell me your misgivings, and I'll see what I can do to comfort you." Then, seeing that the other still hesitated, he continued, "Look here, Jack, you need not be so shy. You and I are too old friends for there to be any question of ceremony between us. Why, bless me, man, I've had fellows whom I've only met a couple of times far more open with me when the fit was on them."

"What fit?"

"The fit of funk, which makes every man wish that he had never been born when he is getting near his wedding day, and is, so to speak, ticketed and done for."

"Do other men feel misgivings at such a time?"

"Most of them do. It is an awful plunge, and I can explain why they think it so. Matrimony is the most serious step of a man's life. He can buy a horse or a house, or take a profession, and still get rid of his bargain if, on further experience, he finds it unsuitable. But he can't do so with his wife. For better, for worse (very much for the worse as he too often finds), he is tied 'till death us do part,' as the prayer-book says."

"And yet a man must, or, at all events, *ought* to marry?"

"Certainly. And Providence, which takes care of everything, sees the necessity, and ordains that once at least in every man's life a temporary madness seizes him and drives him to rush into matrimony."

"Madness, Frank?"

"What else? I know the fit well enough. It begins with an unreasoning hatred for a bachelor life, even in a mess, that is to say, under the most favourable conditions imaginable. Next he begins to have misgivings about his old age (the victim is usually past thirty, and feels that his course is half run), and then there comes a sudden recognition of the many good qualities of the other sex, and a horrible misgiving that, if he is not pretty sharp about it, he will be too late. At this stage press of business may save him, but woe betide him if, on the other hand, his misgivings lead him to take counsel with a married lady friend. She is bound to have a tribe of female belongings (though he probably does not know it), and just when he thinks he is quite safe, his danger is most acute. Women are all up to the game. They betray the confidence—pass the word round that So-and-So is looking out for a wife—pick out one (more likely two or three) for him to choose from—throw her at his head, and in less than no time the poor fool is ticketed and done for."

"And a very good thing too," said his cousin. "It is a man's duty to marry."

"Yes; if he can do so suitably. But nowadays there is no middle class to select from. Women all know too much or too little. They are either romantic or 'blues,' and neither class to my thinking make satisfactory helpmates for most of us."

"And in which class do you place Maude?"

"Eh? What's that?" and the Colonel drew swiftly into his shell again.

"I asked you to which of the two classes you attached Maude?"

"And I beg for the second time to ask you to give me a lead," replied the wary soldier.

But John Strachey's only answer was to look incontinently out of the window, though it did not seem as if he was paying much heed to the landscape as they sped past it. But the Colonel felt that his cue was to give him a little time to harden his heart. Presently he did speak.

"Frank, I sometimes wonder if I am quite good enough for Maude."

"They mostly do," replied the Colonel coolly. "It is a class of misgiving which, in some cases, I have known has led them so far in their abnegation as to escape from an untenable position on the high grounds of their own unworthiness."

"I wish that you would be serious," said the other testily. "Give up your generalities and apply your varied experience to my case."

"My dear Jack, if that is all that you want, it is easily done. As your oldest living friend, I can safely aver that there is no woman in existence who is too good for so good a fellow and so true and honest a man as yourself." (Here his manner, which, it must be confessed, had hitherto been a shade too flippant for the occasion, became serious enough.) "If I were not afraid of your putting the remark down to my ingrained mistrust of the sex, I would go a step further and add, 'or half good enough either.'"

"My dear fellow, you don't know Maude."

"That is my misfortune; not my fault. I know Miss Ashley to be a very fine specimen of her sex physically. 'Good to look upon,' as, I think, the Psalmist has it. And from the few words that I have had with her, I should say that she was by no means deficient in brains, though I confess at the same time that she is for my taste a shade too serious."

"That's it," exclaimed his cousin eagerly. "That's just my difficulty. Maude's whole life is a purpose."

"A *what*?" gasped the Colonel.

"A purpose—a desire to live up to a high ideal, and all that sort of thing."

Now, at bottom, and with those he knew less intimately than he did his cousin, the Colonel was a man of singular discretion and brimful of tact, which, indeed, had been the secret of his success in his chosen career. If his first appearance in this tale has been a shade testy, and his second unnecessarily flippant, it may be urged in his defence that he knew his man. Under any other circumstances he would never have asked his next question, and wild horses would not have dragged from him the fact that he was dying to learn a little more about this girl to whom his cousin had engaged himself. But for a whole week he had possessed his soul in patience, ignoring hints, and parrying veiled questions. And now here was his old chum forcing his confidence upon him, and he would have been more than human had he resisted any longer that most potent of all human foibles—curiosity. They were as private as it was possible to be, in a third-class compartment by themselves and

travelling at the rate of forty-five miles an hour. The opportunity was too good to be missed.

"Jack, tell me a little about this Maude of yours," he said, as he leaned forward to hear the better.

Sympathy opens the heart of a human being as nothing else can hope to do. The clergyman's heart was very full just then, his honest soul weighted with misgivings. It took him half an hour by the Colonel's watch to say all that he had to say; and when he had finished, Eustace was a sadder, if a wiser, man.

Not that when all was said and done there was anything very dreadful to tell. Maude Ashley was the only child of a "somethingian" professor of Sanscrit somewhere, and was, as honest John Strachey (who was sadly behind the times) had expressed it, "born with the intellect of a man." That intellect her father had fostered and developed with all the mingled love and zeal of a parent and a professor rolled into one. At the age of twenty-one, when her father died, she was whatever answers to a scholar of Girton. Her father died two years before the commencement of this tale, and in the interval she had taken a double-first, and was the wonder of the age after a fashion. Eustace's face grew wrinkled as he listened, but never a word he spoke till his cousin had finished. Then he put a question.

"Well, Jack, and where is your difficulty?"

"I doubt if I am good enough for her," answered the bridegroom somewhat dolefully.

"Good enough you are most certainly," came the soldier's next remark, swift and decisive. "Kind enough, loving enough, all good qualities in sufficient



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quantity to please any woman in the world. *But*, my poor Jack, to my old-fashioned notions" (he spoke with the authority of a grandfather, although he was fully six months younger than the man he addressed), "the higher education of women, when it takes such very lofty flights as this, has no attractions. To my idea, cakes and not conic sections, love and not Latin, gooseberry fool rather than Greek, are woman's mission in life. Let her stay at home and mind her children, taking care that her husband, who earns bread for them all, finds nothing but rest in his home. Great Scot! what is the world coming to when a wretched bread-winner comes back from a hard day's work to find that his wife has forgotten the pudding while working out a problem in Euclid, or overlooked the all-essential button on the collar of his shirt because she was translating a chorus from a Greek play?"

"Cold comfort, Frank."

"Perhaps," quoth the oracle, as he let down the window and looked out, "from the fulness of the heart the mouth speaks. This is Peterborough, I see."

He was right. Nor was the stopping of the train the only interruption to further conversation, for there appeared two female passengers, one young, the other old, but both unlovely, who filled the compartment with fumes of peppermint and patchouli, and who, despite the fact that it was a duly appointed smoking compartment into which they had purposely mounted, as, by a perverse twist of the feminine mind, deemed "safer" than others, none the less grumbled all the way to London about the "abominable smell of that dirty tobacco."

CHAPTER III.

HAD honest John Strachey been aware of all the dangers and difficulties which threatened the frail barque that bore his matrimonial hopes, he would have been even more uneasy regarding his own future than he was. For, at the very time when, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Peterborough, on the Great Northern line, he and his cousin were discussing his misgivings, the fair damsel to whom he had plighted his troth was indulging in an equally clouded forecast of her own future in the chaste recesses of her suburban home.

The bridegroom-elect had been perfectly candid with his friend. He had told him all that he knew of the girl he was about to marry, and most of the deductions which he drew from the premises set forth. But he had not told him (for the simple reason that he did not know himself) much more than half that there was to tell. For our system of marrying and giving in marriage has this peculiarity that, in the great majority of cases, we leave the choice of husband or wife to the haphazard predilection of the moment, and that, after verifying a small percentage of the

selected individual's account of his or her self, we leave the rest to chance, and decide the most important question of our lives by what we can see on the surface, which—in the case of young women more particularly—is apt to be misleading in the last degree.

John Strachey had stated (and his cousin's personal observation had borne him out) that his future help-mate was fair to look upon. For her intellect her own deeds had vouched; she was a clever and receptive soul, capable of assimilating an indefinite quantity of information, and of reproducing it when needed for purposes of examination. So far she did credit both to her training and to the qualities which she had inherited from her father, the professor. But in all this she was very much in the position of a highly cultivated plant at a flower show. She was beautiful and her quality was beyond a doubt, but the question arose as to whether she was not bound to collapse as soon as the show was done, overweighted by the supreme effort of preparation. This, as her future husband knew, is a thing which happens far too often in the case of young men, and how much greater was the chance of a breakdown of such a highly refined mechanism as is a woman? To carry out our simile of a plant to its legitimate conclusion—the question which John Strachey was for ever asking himself was whether this grand specimen was not better fitted for the show tent than for the domestic conservatory?

It is not every man who has the courage to marry a “double-first.” The pendulum has swung a good

deal of late years in favour of the higher education of womankind, and we are all of us prepared now-a-days to accept the inevitable, and to admit the existence of a good deal in our wives which would never have been tolerated in our mothers. But, as John Strachey was beginning to discover, in great social movements it is not always wise to travel on the top of the wave. A late awakening to this fact was the cause of the young clergyman's misgivings regarding his own fitness to be the mate of such a paragon among women.

But had he only known what was passing just about the same time in Maude Ashley's mind, his misgivings would have increased to such an extent as to overwhelm him. The girl had been bred in a veritable forcing-house, and her head from early childhood had been stuffed with every class of learning which happened to occur to the imagination of her enthusiastic father. The wonder was that she had not broken down long before, and it was only her grand physique and love of open air and exercise which had saved her. She had become by the time of her examinations a walking encyclopedia of miscellaneous information, and now that the effort was over—her successes won—she was not only suffering from the inevitable reaction, but the question arose, "What next?" Now that she had collected this store of learning, what on earth was she going to do with it? She was, in fact, one of the victims of a half-completed social revolution. The tendency of her age was to admit women on equal terms to all the educational advantages for

so long the monopoly of man, but hitherto it had totally—or all but totally—failed to furnish the necessary continuation, in the shape of a career in after-life, to which all this high-pressure education should be but the prelude. Medicine she might practise under certain limitations, but the Bar, the Senate, the Church—in fact, almost every career which absorbs the best of a nation's young blood was as rigorously closed against her as it always had been. Even teaching, except to her own sex, was more or less out of the question, and the end of it all was that, unless she adopted the extremely uncertain trade of letters (the only one besides medicine in which she could hope to meet men on anything like equal terms), she would have to strike out a line for herself.

And this was the rock on which she was likely to come to grief. The worst of the class of education which she had received is that it is the product rather of the arm-chair, book-worm type of philosopher than of the man of action. She was cram-full of theories on every possible subject. But theories will not always stand the test of practice, and, unfortunately for her, she had been taught all her life to worship the advanced thinkers, which, being translated, means too often the men a century or so ahead of their time; and she had also been taught to despise the old rule-of-thumb practice, which (for all that we may protest to the contrary) is what is followed by the majority of mankind, and what (*pace* the theorists aforesaid) is best suited to most people.

The girl was burning to follow up her career of

success at school by a career of success in after-life. She wanted, in fact, to astonish the world, and her difficulty was to find out how to do it. Conviction kept her clear of the pitfalls of a new religion; delicacy, natural in one so young, gave her an instinctive mistrust of the ways of the shrieking sisterhood; common sense warned her against throwing in her lot with the lady politicians, with their Yankee log-rolling tricks of supporting any fad by which they could obtain assistance in furthering their own particular aims of political equality with their male belongings; but there was always one other work open to her, viz., the social—as distinct from the political—advancement of humanity in general, and women in particular. It was upon this that she decided as a first attempt.

The professor's widow lived at Lee, hard by Blackheath, whither she had retired to make one of a genteel suburban community after her husband's death. It is a place in close touch with London, above all with the City, which is London's heart, as witness Cannon Street Station any week-day about 5 p.m. Blackheath and neighbourhood has its friends and relations in every part of London proper, and carries on an exchange of mild hospitalities which serve to keep its many friendships alive. Here, in a choice gathering of tea-drinkers, Maude Ashley met John Strachey, the hard-working enthusiast who was vicar of a newly created district in the East-end of London—learned what he was, drew him out, heard his pitiful tale of loveless lives, and squalor, and brutality, and sin; saw her opportunity, and asked

the Reverend John to tea at her own house. In less than a month it was all over. John saw a lovely, highly-educated lady who could enter into his feelings and sympathise with his aspirations. She saw a noble-hearted man who could make her life beautiful—because useful to mankind—and the engagement was announced.

All their friends went into raptures over so suitable a union as this promised to be. They were divided between John's luck at finding such a help-mate, and Maude's at finding such a career ready to her hand. The only thing left to do was to hurry on the wedding, which was fixed to take place as soon as Miss Ashley's two years' mourning for her father had elapsed, and a notification of how matters stood had brought Colonel Eustace home hot-foot from Simla to fulfil a long-standing engagement to officiate (for this occasion only) as best man.

Now, the moment that the Colonel saw his cousin's fiancée he realised that Parson John had made a mistake. The worldly soldier understood rather more of these matters than did the simple priest who had spent the greater part of his life doing his Master's work in fetid slums. Before he had been half an hour in Miss Ashley's company, Eustace had come to the conclusion that this was an arrangement which could never work. He understood the sex pretty well, and he was an exponent of that school of thought which greatly prefers the old-fashioned ways of our sires and grandsires, and which believes that woman's mission lies in the glorifying of her own, her husband's, and her children's home. Soldier

men are given this way, for, much to their misfortune, they see a good deal of the sex which it is not always given to other men to see—to parsons least of all. This is one of the reasons why the leaders of the new movement abuse the soldier, set him on a pillory, and hold him, his doings, and, most of all, his morals up to scorn. He is in reality no worse than his fellows, better, indeed, in many respects, but he is always the typical black sheep of the “unco’ guid,” regardless of the fact that there are black sheep in every trade or calling. He stands forth as a butterfly and a drone (though goodness knows that he is neither), and he further commits the unpardonable sin of admiring all that is womanly in woman, and of hating all that is self-assertive and bold—relic in this of the old-time knight-errantry—so he has to pay the penalty in various ways. Every day his character as a class is assailed with as much justice as if the whole bench of bishops had to carry the sins of half-a-dozen unfrocked priests, while privately the sex does its best to spoil him by such petting and attention as is the guerdon of a profession around which, even in these prosaic days, there still hangs the halo of glory dear to the feminine mind.

Colonel Eustace read Maude Ashley like a book. He saw and admired and pitied most of all, for he guessed at once her motive in accepting his cousin as her husband, and he dreaded to think what would be the upshot of it all when John Strachey in his turn learned the truth. It was all so hurried so far as he was concerned—past the eleventh hour, in fact, when he arrived on the scene, that he could not hope to do

anything. Even if his own sense had not taught him long since that there cannot be any interference between man and woman in such cases as these, that they must be left to shape their destinies for themselves, the matter was not one in which he had any call to move. But his conversation with his cousin in the railway carriage had awakened in his mind a keen regret that it was now too late to do anything but let things run their appointed course.

He might think so, but Maude Ashley held a different opinion. That young lady had been asking herself that very question, and was even at the same moment trying to arrive at a proper conclusion on her own account. There is in all revolutions this constant symptom, that opinions change and march ("rush" would perhaps be the better word) with a rapidity which carries the revolutionaries themselves off their feet. Maude Ashley was a revolutionary in a way—would have been only too glad to upset society to make a career for herself—and now, having got off the beaten track, she was hurrying along the new one at a rate which caused her very opinions to change from day to day, and which rendered her, in the truest sense of the word, inconstant as ever yet woman was.

There need be no mistake. The girl was not a jilt in the common sense—far from it. But in her relations with John Strachey she was (in fact, they both were) at this serious disadvantage that she was marrying, not a man, but an idea. Personal respect there was; love there was none. And here at the very outset of her career she was going to give a first-rate

example of the relative merits of theory and of rule-of-thumb. This last has always held that the sheet anchor of married life is mutual esteem and love, while theory steps in with comfortless assertions about affinities and so on. Miss Ashley had started on her career with the notion that she and her affinity were going to make a match of it with Parson John and his. She did not care for love, knew nothing about it in fact, because she never read any but the severest poetry, and called the perusal of a novel a waste of time. She had been brought up on theories, and she meant to give her theories a fling, and, as a preliminary, one week by the calendar before it had been arranged that she and John Strachey were to link their fates for ever, she was coolly deliberating with the precision of a mathematician what would be the easiest and most conclusive way of breaking to her fiancé the fact that, in her opinion, it had all been a mistake.

Thus, while the man who was her lover, though she was not his love, was being whirled homewards to his east-end parish and to her, she, his future wife, sat in her boudoir—pardon, perhaps it were better to say her study, for the bright room in the suburban villa which was all her own was a compound of the two—trying to think this out. The problem was of a class new to her, the subject rather beneath her notice, but there was no help. She thought she had discovered yet another career of far wider influence than the one open to John Strachey's wife. But, alas! attached to the new career was a new man, and this it was which made her task difficult, not to say unpleasant.

CHAPTER IV.

UNDER the circumstances it was odd that Colonel Eustace's hand should give the final push that toppled over the ill-built castle of his cousin's hopes. None the less the fact remains, though all he said was, "A native, by all that is quaint!"

It happened this way. Parson John on his arrival in London, retired—as in duty bound on a Saturday afternoon—to his evil-smelling parish in the East-end, while the Colonel betook himself to his comfortable rooms in Duke Street, St. James', as a preliminary to dining at his club. But they separated on the understanding that they were to meet again at Charing Cross at three o'clock on the following Monday afternoon, and journey together to Lee to report their return. Monday was the day set apart by the professor's widow for the reception of her friends. On this day she remained at home and dispensed tea by deputy (her daughter, to wit) to such of her acquaintance as happened to drop in, and as her circle was large, and both she and her daughter were popular, it usually happened that, in the course of the afternoon, her trim drawing-room got so crowded

that there were no chairs left, while the parlour-maid spent her time either in the hall ushering in fresh callers or on the stairs bringing up fresh teacups from the hidden depths below. To such an assembly as this, just about the time when the tide of visitors was about flood, the two gentlemen were announced. Now, it happened that Miss Ashley knew little of her fiancé's movements beyond a general understanding that she was to expect him some time early in the week. By her own special wish, letters between her and her lover had been dispensed with (which was in itself sufficient proof of how little of the conventional courtship there was in their arrangements, for how does real love better express itself than by covering many sheets of paper with anything save news?), and, with the perversity which dogs all human expectations, she had interpreted this arrangement as meaning that he certainly would not come on the Monday, especially as she knew that John Strachey avoided that particular day because—poor fellow, being in love—he could not content himself with the fractional allowance of Maude's society which was all that he could expect among so many guests.

Nothing could have occurred more inopportunistically for Miss Ashley's plans than this unlooked-for appearance of the cousins. Her original intention had been to give John Strachey his *congé* in a letter which should await his arrival from the North. But, being full of her idea that he would never appear on this particular afternoon, she had delayed the decisive step until she had had one more opportunity of testing

her new idea and the man who went with it, in much the same way as the servants are sometimes let in a furnished house.

When John Strachey and his cousin were ushered into the room, she was sitting beside her tea table, with the man attached to the idea seated in the place of honour at her right hand. In suburban drawing-rooms a little goes a long way, and the man was the lion of the hour. Just at the moment when the Colonel walked up to shake hands with Miss Ashley, the man had his back turned to the door, being engaged in handing cake, and it was only when he replaced the plate upon the table that Eustace got a full look at him, with the result that he was startled into exclaiming (just loud enough for Miss Ashley, but no one else, to hear), "A native, by all that's quaint!"

Even before this unconscious disapproval of her latest theories, Miss Ashley had conceived a violent dislike to the man whom most other ladies admired, and whom men called a sterling good fellow. And as for the unlucky sentence which was to have such weighty results all round, it was not so much the words (which were harmless enough in themselves), but the tone and expression at which Maude Ashley took offence. A whole pamphlet in twenty-four pages, neatly stitched, could not have stated his feelings more plainly—"A native has no right to be in decent society. This man is a native; therefore he has no right to be here."

And this was precisely what was passing in Colonel Eustace's mind. He was an Anglo-Indian, and, as

such, intolerant of the presence of natives in society where ladies were to be found. The objection sounds harsh ; but, like everything else, it has two sides, and a little story, taken from fact, will illustrate the point. One day in India a great personage—a Lieutenant-Governor at least—of the type that shares the desire of every right-thinking Englishman to raise the standard of the natives, but is not always judicious in its choice of means, gave an official dinner-party, to which were bidden, among others, a European official and his wife, and a distinguished native gentleman, who was respected and liked by all who knew him. The official was nothing very great—a mere head of some department which controlled the destinies and the comfort of a few millions of men ; but he had his feelings (which in an official was decidedly wrong, or at best injudicious), and so had his wife. Just before the dinner was announced, he learned that Mrs. Commissioner of Carrots and Potatoes, or whatever it was, had been allotted to his native friend. He at once sought out the aide-de-camp whose duty it was to attend to these matters, and asked if it was true. “Yes.” “Then I object.” “Etiquette forbids your doing so in His Honour’s house.” “At any rate, you will be good enough to order my carriage for me.” And, after a few more sharp words, the “arrangement in scarlet and gold” gave way, and the worthy couple departed, un-dined. The next morning the official thunder began to roar, in the form of a demand for “an apology to His Honour’s native guest.” But the Commissioner stood to his guns. “When Mr. Sri Dhur Bahadur brings his wife to meet mine in society, I will

raise no further difficulties, and will apologise as well," he answered, "but not before." And His Greatness saw the point of the objection, and pressed the matter no further. For the sting of the Commissioner's reply lay in this, that the native gentleman's father and grandfather had been in the habit of shutting up their wives and other female belongings in a courtyard surrounded by a species of dog-kennel, each about ten feet square—called rooms, by courtesy—and had never let these unfortunate ladies out, or any male (their own sons of more than ten years of age included) in to visit them. And it was long odds that Mr. Sri Dhur had not greatly improved matters himself, and probably among his own kith and kin was wont to say hard things of the English ladies who went about unveiled, and mixed at will in society frequented by men. In point of fact, the Commissioner had put his finger on the spot, and proved that the time was not yet come when English roses could be grafted with success on an Aryan briar.

This story, or something of the same sort, was running through the Colonel's head when he made that unlucky speech intended only for his own ears. The fair theorist who had overheard it felt only indignation against the man of practical knowledge, whom she placed upon a level with slave-dealers and their kin. But almost before the girl had recovered from her indignation, or the Colonel from his surprise, worthy Mrs. Ashley, an elderly, old-fashioned dame, whose worship of her husband and pride in her daughter's brilliant success had never quite effaced the simpler notions of her own girlhood, turned from

her son-in-law-elect, with whom she had just cordially shaken hands, to pounce upon the Colonel as a man who knew India well, and had therefore been sent by Providence for the special purpose of being introduced to her foreign guest.

"Ah, Colonel Eustace," she exclaimed with effusion, "how very delightful of you to call when Mr. Molar Bacchus was here. Mr. Bacchus, let me introduce to you Colonel Eustace of Simla. You will, I am sure, find that you have many friends in common in the Indies."

A very faint flash of amusement shot out of the Colonel's eyes at the notion that there was any prospect that he, whose paths were cast in the pleasant places frequented by the Government of India, was likely to have acquaintances in common with Mowlah Bux of heaven-knew-where. But he did not let his hostess see that he thought there was anything incongruous in the idea, and he bowed and smiled, and slipped through the crowd, which threatened to upset the furniture, to where the foreigner, whom he himself called a native, stood looking a little uncomfortable and confused.

[As he stepped forward, a low hum of admiration passed round that female suburban throng, for lions are scarce in such quarters, and here were two meeting on one tiny patch of ground. "The Colonel Eustace, my dear, the famous Colonel Eustace of—of Simla, who so greatly distinguished himself last year fighting against the what-do-you-call-'ems," and so on, until the whisper reached an artless maiden from the country, who, *more suo*, wanted to know

more, and ventured a query as to "who? where? and when?" which caused the rest to cover their confusion by looking shocked, and saying how kind it was of him to come so far to attend his cousin's wedding, and so on. Meanwhile, quite unconscious of the stir which his arrival had created, Colonel Eustace had placed himself beside his new acquaintance, to whom, for his hostess's sake, he meant to be as civil as he could. A man who knows his India well can generally tell pretty well to what class a native belongs, and Eustace saw at once that the man, who seemed absurdly cowed and upset by his own appearance on the scene, was a Mohammedan, and from Upper India for choice.

"Home to study medicine or the law, I suppose?" hazarded the Colonel, who knew that his surmise could not be far amiss.

"Yes, I have just been called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn," replied Mowlah Bux, B.A.

"Had you met Mr. Bacchus before?" asked Maude Ashley, coming swiftly upon them with the Colonel's cup of tea. She had noted with a woman's quickness how Mowlah Bux seemed suddenly to have shrunk—how his wonted easy assurance was gone; and she was both puzzled and annoyed at the strange ascendancy her enemy had over her friend.

"No, never—not any tea for me, thank you—but I think Mr. Mowlah Bux will bear me out when I say that gentlemen of his nationality, when they do favour us with a visit, usually come for purposes of study and self-improvement."

Mr. Mowlah Bux, B.A., hastened to assent.

"Oh, yes, certainly, of course," he said.

"And have you many friends in common?" asked Mrs. Ashley, bearing down upon them again.

A swift glance at the man beside him caused the kind-hearted Colonel to parry the question.

"You forget, my dear Mrs. Ashley," he said, with a smile, "what a big place India is. Very likely, till this moment, Mr. Mowlah Bux and I have never been within a thousand miles of each other."

"Yes, it is a very big place," assented the other; "but I have to catch my train back to town, as I have to eat my dinner to-night. I will say farewell."

He bowed gravely to the Colonel, who nodded pleasantly in answer, and then left the room. But Eustace's sharp eye detected that his hostess's daughter was most cordial in saying good-bye, and he even thought that he caught a quick look, which might have meant anything except approval, which the girl threw towards himself at the same time. But he had to attend to his kind hostess, who was full of regrets that her guest had had to leave.

"So unusual," she remarked; "he generally stays till quite the last. But another time you must really come to lunch one day to meet him. I am sure that you will find him such a charming man."

The Colonel shared her regrets, and added his own that the time at his disposal was so short that he dared not promise to have a single day to spare. And then he was introduced to the inquisitive maiden aforesaid, who gushed about India for the next half-hour, at the close of which his cousin came to tell him that it was time to go. He had a parish meeting that

night so could not stay to dine, as Mrs. Ashley had suggested.

Maude Ashley walked with them to the door to see them off. The Colonel would have made himself discreetly scarce down the garden walk to enable the lovers to make their tender farewells, but the young lady saw his kind intention and forestalled it, much to his surprise. He thought, however, that if her farewells to her future husband were cool, to himself they were positively frigid, and, it struck him, a little defiant as well.

John Strachey sighed as he shut the gate.

"An unsatisfactory afternoon," he said.

"Did you think so? I enjoyed it immensely," answered the Colonel, pulling himself together and trying to appear sincere. "Of course, I can quite understand that you would have preferred something a little quieter."

"Oh, yes, certainly. Of course I should," replied John doubtfully.

A pause. Then, a few steps further on, the Colonel asked a question.

"Where did they pick up that native fellow, Mowlah Bux?"

His cousin looked at him out of the corner of his eye.

"What makes you ask that question?" he said.

"Nothing particular. Only we don't much encourage men of his stamp about our women-folk in the East."

"Maude tells me that he is a most charming and well-informed man."

"Of course. They mostly are. As plausible as a shaddock and as slippery as an eel. Did you watch him when I was speaking to him?"

"I did, and I confess that his manner puzzled me."

"Well, you see, I understood him, which none of you others did. I know all about him and his home."

"What? Had you met before?"

"No, but I know the type, and he did not like my knowing it. That was why he bolted."

"Eustace, you don't like him?"

"I am not in love with his looks certainly."

"I shall begin to think that you are as prejudiced about black men as about ladies."

"Don't call them black, Jack. We never do, and, still more, don't class the two together—they don't run in couples. Why, I can't explain—it would take all night. But I would like to know one thing."

"What's that?"

"What on earth that fellow's little game may be."

"To enjoy English society, I suppose."

At which simple answer the Colonel only smiled.

CHAPTER V.

It was on the Wednesday, two days after our cousins' visit to Lee, that the crash came. Colonel Eustace, when in London, habitually breakfasted at his club. If there is one thing at which the Anglo-Indian rushes open-mouthed (so to speak) on his return from exile, it is a fried sole. Five minutes past nine had seen the Colonel entering the club, and twenty minutes later he was enjoying his fish (with an egg to follow), and running his eye over a not very voluminous correspondence of no particular interest. He had finished his letters, and helped himself to the second half of his sole, ruminating the while over the fact that his engagements were limited for that day to a visit to his tailor to try on his wedding garments for next Monday's ceremony, when the waiter, swooping noiselessly down to carry off the empty dish, had to dodge a small boy hurrying swiftly in with a telegram on a silver salver. A whispered colloquy followed, at the end of which the boy had found his man, and Eustace was tearing open the yellow envelope.

"What's up now?" he thought, as he spread it out.

"Hullo, what's this? 'For God's sake, come at once. Something awful has happened. Strachey.'" He glanced at his half-finished breakfast. "All very well, Jack, but a parson should not use strong language. I shall need to punish you, my dear fellow, by taking my time over my breakfast," with which he helped himself to another slice of muffin.

All the same, the comfort of the meal was gone. Luckily he had not much to do. The tailor could wait. He fidgeted for a few minutes—left the room—lighted a cigar, and strolled back to his lodgings.

Here on the table he presently discovered another telegram. "It never rains but it pours," he muttered. "I wonder who this can be. Hullo! here's a coincidence. 'For God's sake, come at once. Something awful has happened. Strachey.'" He took the first out of his pocket and spread it beside the second. Result—Identical in every respect, and handed in at the same time. Without further hesitation he took his hat, walked out to the street, and hailed a hansom.

"Fenchurch Street, as hard as you can go. Avoid the Strand or any place that is likely to detain you."

And Jarvey entered into the spirit of the thing and did his best, with the result that before half-past eleven the Colonel was hammering on the door of the plain and unpretentious building which did duty as a vicarage for his cousin's parish.

"Cheerful sort of place to live in," he muttered to himself while waiting for some one to open the door.

"I should not greatly care for it myself. I wonder what Miss Higher-Education will make of it when she comes here."

It was not an inviting place by any means. Somewhere down near the Docks—long rows of ugly, flat-faced, modern-built, back-to-back houses, a sort of ghastly exaggeration of all the crimes of the outlying districts of our great manufacturing towns—what might fairly be called a working-class neighbourhood, suggestive of unlovely lives all the week, with an occasional orgie on a Saturday night—just the place for an honest and self-sacrificing religion to let itself loose in, but certainly not the place to live in if you were addicted to such comforts as wealth provides. Just the place for a great nature to go down into and to disappear for ever, leading an earnest, self-abasing, self-denying life, and never to come to the surface again except in a biography more talked about than read. The place for a latter-day saint and martyr, the place where a social enthusiast ought to go to, but does not, because too often enthusiasm is a debased form of vanity, and must work in such glorified surroundings as the platform affords, and can never, never be content to burrow into the depths, blind to the mire it has to penetrate, like the humble mole.

"Colonel Eustace, sir?" asked the tidy maid who opened the door. "Oh, I am so glad you have come. The master has been asking for you ever since he came in this morning." And she showed him in.

The room which John Strachey used as a study was plain and square, and plainly furnished as well.

A writing-table pushed close up to the fireplace (empty just then) with a writing-chair before it, a waste-paper basket on one side and a revolving bookcase on the other, a big table littered with papers and writing materials, but tidy in its very untidiness, since its owner knew how to lay his hand on every paper there, if he required it. Between the table and the bay window which lighted the room was an open space carpeted with a well-worn tapestry strip, up and down which the Reverend John was wont to stride as he composed his sermons, worried over the cares of his parish, or reasoned with some half-savage, wholly-heathen brute whom (to use his own expression) he had tempted into his den, and up and down this strip the Colonel found him raging now, parson and good Christian as he was, like a ferocious beast.

"Jack, what's the matter?" exclaimed the Colonel.

He might well ask. This usually staid and sober clergyman was only too plainly suffering under an attack of violent excitement.

"What? Nothing—that is, everything. What a time you have been coming, Frank. I had nearly given you up."

"All the same I came as fast as I could."

"Well, I don't want you to come here to argue. Sit down while I explain to you what the trouble is."

"Thanks; that is perhaps the wisest thing that you could do," answered the Colonel, as he seated himself in the writing-chair and swung it round so as to face his friend.

John Strachey advanced to the other side of the table and leaned across it.

"She has thrown me over," he said.

"She's what?" gasped the Colonel.

"Jilted me—thrown me over—given me my *congé*—sent me about my business. There is to be no wedding—no helper in the parish—no anything except a man who has been a fool for his pains."

It was really astonishing to see how completely this stunning blow had put him off his balance. His good temper and his courage were proverbial. He would dive into a slum and face a drunken brute of a man, stand his insults, overcome the other's sulkiness by his own good-humour, and so wind up by gaining what was not infrequently a lasting victory. But this girl's conduct had been too much for him. Maude Ashley had merely shot at an affinity, but she had hit a man, a human being with feelings, pride and love included, and she had wounded him badly. Five days from this time the pair were to have been made one, the dresses were ordered, the guests invited, every soul of their mutual acquaintance informed, and now, without rhyme or reason, and without a shadow of consideration, the whole thing was at an end. He cared a good deal for her—he cared a little for himself as well—and all that he could see or understand was that, without warning or excuse, this woman had deliberately jilted him under the most humiliating circumstances, leaving him to get out of the mess as best he could. He must suffer alike in his feelings and in the consideration of others,

and he was quite overwhelmed—and may be forgiven—

Who steals my purse steals trash (says Bombastes);
Who steals my honour takes that which benefits him nothing
and leaves me poor indeed.

That was where the trouble came in. The fact that his dismissal was due to Maude Ashley's caprice did not go far to help him. His own reputation must suffer, relations and friends would throw their share of blame on him, and even in the eyes of his parishioners he would be lowered by this girl throwing him over at the eleventh hour like this.

Selfish, perhaps, but human. Everybody is selfish at bottom, especially those who flatter themselves that they are not. Poor human nature will need another coat or two of the anti-fouling composition before the reverse is the case, or before, in the slights and crosses of everyday life, still more in its greater crises, we cease to make our first question, "Where will this hit us?"

Our Colonel was not a prophet, but it is only due to him to remember that he had had pronounced misgivings from the very first. But he was very fond of his cousin, and he hated to see him suffering, so he set to work to probe the wound at once.

"What reason does she give?" he asked.

"That she fears we are not suited to each other," replied the other.

"Ah!" Some men might have added, "I always told you so," or "I expected this," but Colonel Eustace was not of that sort. "That may be true, Jack," he said, "but it is a little vague. Surely she gave her reasons."

"There!" The clergyman indignantly threw a note across to him: "Read that."

"Is this the note Miss Ashley has written you?" asked the other.

"It is. Read it."

"No, thank you, Jack," replied the Colonel, as he handed it back unopened, "not that way. You are angry and excited, and in no way yourself; therefore you are no fit judge whether I or any other human being but yourself ought to see it. You probably don't know what is in it."

"Not know what is in it? Why, I have read it twenty times!"

"Very likely, but I don't care to read it to myself without being absolutely certain that its contents are of a nature to be passed round."

"You are very particular," said John Strachey, testily.

"Perhaps, but see here. Do you read it aloud to me slowly. There is no better way of getting at the meaning of anything written. If you come to anything you don't want me to know, skip it."

The other savagely tore the letter from the envelope and commenced to read, while the Colonel, his hands palm to palm, sat opposite to him, wearing a strictly judicial air.

"'My dear Jack' (very dear, I expect)," so the reader began. "'My dear Jack, I am afraid what I have to say to you will be rather a shock (no mistake there, madam), but I have felt for some time past that all talk of a marriage between you and me has been a huge mistake (it has, on my part) The harder I

have tried to consider it, and to think out in what direction your future happiness lies (you'll observe she says nothing about her own), the more convinced I have become that our roads lie best apart (it is a pity she did not find this out earlier). Don't think that I have come to a hasty decision in this matter (you wouldn't be a woman if you hadn't made up your mind in half an hour), and there is no one else in the case (if that's true, why mention it), but after a month's very earnest *study* (scratched out and *thought* substituted) I have firmly made up my mind to break off our engagement at once. There is no use your trying to make me change my mind, still less to come and see me. I decline to do either (which is not English, but may be classical), and all I ask is a plain acknowledgment that you have received this letter (you'll observe she wants the last word). Always your friend and well-wisher, Maude Ashley.' There, Eustace! what do you make of that?"

"Nothing—absolutely nothing," replied the Colonel, with emphasis. "As you have read it, it is absolute and undiluted nonsense. But as there is nothing in it which I ought not to hear, give me the letter and let me read it for myself."

For the second time was Miss Ashley's letter indignantly tossed across the table, and this time the Colonel read it carefully. His friend stood watching him as he did so.

"She writes a nice hand, but rather masculine," said Eustace, looking up in the middle. He wanted, if he could, to inoculate his cousin with his own perfect coolness, by no means an easy thing to do

when the man afflicted is suffering under a strong sense of wrong with which you can only have a very vicarious sympathy.

"Very," said John Strachey, as he resumed his pacing up and down. When he next looked round the letter was on the table, and his cousin in a brown study.

"Well?" he asked.

"Cool, curt, and conclusive," replied Eustace. Where-with the storm burst. In moments of great mental strain the best of men are apt to let human nature get the upper hand of personal training, though in a form which in a measure varies with their own particular profession. It is supposed that bargees, naval and military officers (whose tempers have a trick of getting shorter the longer they themselves are in climbing to the top of the tree) and factory girls have the greatest command of bad language. But, after all, mankind generally finds a relief at times of excitement in a good fling of explosive language. John Strachey did not exactly swear—that his calling forbade—but he poured out his wrath in scathing terms, freely interlarded with expressions such as a well-read clergyman has always at command, in a manner so stinging, so blood-curdling, that it raised the hair on the Colonel's head as effectually as would have been done by, say, an electric comb. The poor fellow had been clean thrown off his balance by this sudden shock, and for two whole hours he had been feeding his angry soul on the imaginings of his own purely human devilry. So, as the Colonel listened to him, he experienced a nasty, creepy feeling down his

back, and fairly shuddered at the strength of the vituperation, none the less deadly because it was neither coarse nor vulgar, with which he assailed the situation and its fair, but false, creator.

But Eustace was a wise man and knew how hard his cousin had been hit, and how much better it was for him (so to speak) to blow off steam. So he sat still and listened to his ravings for half an hour or more. Then he rose, thinking that they had both had as much as was good for them, and brought him up with a round turn.

"Jack, I want some luncheon to make up for the breakfast you spoilt. You don't want to starve me altogether, do you?"

John Strachey was himself in a moment.

"My dear,, fellow, I am awfully sorry: I never noticed the clock."

"Then show your contrition," replied Eustace, "by losing no more time in ringing the bell."

Then, when they had finished luncheon and his cousin seemed a little quieted, he asked him what he meant to do next.

"How do I know? You see, Frank, I should not care so much if only the parish did not know what an awful fool I have made of myself."

"Or this girl of you," suggested the other, correcting him. "But don't bother about that. The parish will probably know nothing about it, and even if they do, what then?"

"I wish I thought so," groaned the other.

"You are a very conceited man, Jack, if you think these people here take so much interest in your

concerns. They tolerate you as a sort of necessary evil, and accept at your hands whatever they can get. But whether you live or die, or marry, or anything else, is not a matter of moment to them. They would care a good deal more about the domestic arrangements of the family cat."

"But I can't, in any case, leave matters where they are," urged the other.

"You are right, you cannot. You must do something."

"But what?"

"Are you seriously asking for my advice?"

"I am."

"Then I am delighted to hear it, as it shows that you have not sent for me without wanting me, and shows signs of returning sanity as well. Now, Jack, I'll tell you what you have got to do. Go straight to Lee and interview this reluctant lady-love of yours."

"Go to Lee?"

"Just so, to ascertain if she is in earnest or not."

"But she wrote and told me specially not to do so."

"Which suggests to me that she was afraid that you might take her letter too honestly and literally. Now, that one sentence alone raises a doubt in my mind whether she was not merely getting up a lovers' quarrel."

"I wish I thought so," said the other. "What makes you suggest so unlikely an idea?"

"It is one of two possibilities. She may want to bring you more humble than ever to her feet, or she may not."

"In which latter case I shall be in a nice predica-

ment," said his cousin, whose spirits were falling again.

Now, the Colonel's head was still ringing with John Strachey's own denunciations of this fickle girl.

"How do you know," he asked, quite unconscious that he was mimicking his cousin's ways, "that this may not be a blessing in disguise—a chastening sent for your own good?"

And he said it so gravely that even John Strachey, worn as he was by anxiety, saw the humour of this turning of the tables, and smiled.

CHAPTER VI.

BUT for the dire necessity of striking while the iron was hot, the Colonel would have soon felt inclined to regret his precipitancy in dragging his cousin down to Lee that same afternoon. But only five days from the time appointed for the wedding, there could be no delay, and so they went.

Nevertheless, as they rode in sombre silence in their railway carriage to Lee, Colonel Eustace noticed with dismay how ill and depressed his companion had become. John Strachey had not been in good health for some time past, and it was this which had caused them to seek the restful, health-giving Yorkshire moors the previous week. The cares of an east-end parish are many and weighty; the opportunities for relaxation are few and far between. The clergyman, a very glutton for work, was run down—driven to a standstill by his own fiery zeal in trying to ameliorate the lot of those among whom he worked. The shock of his dismissal, the hot indignation which had provoked the outbreak of that morning, had more than undone the good achieved by the previous week; and as he sat leaning back in his seat, the pale, sad face,

the quivering lips, the trembling, nervous movement of the hands told his companion that, whatever he might have been that morning, the rejected suitor was now hardly equal to the ordeal which lay before him.

But it had to be faced. Colonel Eustace, under his outward, half-cynical levity, carried a heart as true and as sympathetic as any man alive, and so far as one man can enter into another's misfortunes, he felt for his cousin's trouble. And he knew that he was doing his duty in forcing his hand, that the thing had to be faced, and faced at once.

It was he who, once they rang the bell at their journey's end, took the lead.

"Was Miss Ashley in?" he asked.

"Yes, but unable to see any one," the maid answered, looking with curiosity at the pair of visitors, as servants will when they have had special instructions regarding them.

"Then we will see Mrs. Ashley," said the Colonel firmly. "We have come some way, and must see her before we return to London. If," he added, seeing a protest rising to the servant's lips, "she is out, we will wait. If she is at home, we can sit down somewhere until it is convenient for her to see us. But see her we must—and will."

There is nothing like firmness in such cases. A stranger might still have been sent away, but hardly the accepted suitor of the daughter of the house. The maid raised no further difficulties, but showed them into the drawing-room, while she went to inform her mistress who were there.

John Strachey threw himself dejectedly into a low easy-chair. The Colonel, on the contrary, planted himself on the hearth rug, but neither spoke. The refusal to see them had served to confirm the former's misgivings—the fact that they had gained admittance at all had raised the spirits of his friend. They had not long to wait, for the door was speedily opened and closed behind a new-comer, and almost before he had risen from his seat, John Strachey was shaking hands with the mother of his promised bride. It was a painful moment for all three of them, for the Colonel had the disadvantage of being *de trop*. But good, motherly Mrs. Ashley, who knew the close affection which existed between her son-in-law-elect and his cousin, felt no embarrassment as she shook hands warmly with the former.

"Jack, what shall I say, what can I say?" she asked. "I am more shocked and grieved than I can tell. To think that any daughter of mine—Maude, of all women in the world—should have done this thing. It is no fault of mine."

"I never thought it was," answered the broken-hearted man, "or I should not have come to you now. What is her reason?"

"I cannot tell you. I know nothing of it, except that this morning at breakfast she told me that she had written to end all between you, and asked that, should you come to demand a personal explanation, I would forbid you the house. This I refused to do, and when I pressed her for her reasons, she would, or could, give me none, except that she had arrived at the conclusion that the engagement was a mistake,

and that she meant to end it before it was too late."

"And does she think of you—of me—of the way she is treating us all?" he asked.

"I do not know, I cannot tell. I can only say that I told her what I thought, begged her not to wreck her happiness in a moment of caprice, and that it ended by her refusing to continue the discussion. Has there been any quarrel between you two?"

"No, there has not. From the first day I met Maude to this moment there has never been even a difference of opinion between us."

"And what are you going to do?"

"I hardly know. I have come to try and see her, by the advice of Eustace here."

The mention of the Colonel's name reminded the good woman of his presence, which, in her agitation, she had forgotten. She hastened to make amends.

"I beg your pardon, Colonel Eustace," she said, turning and shaking hands with him; "this sad business has put everything else out of my head."

"And well it may. But now, Mrs. Ashley, that I have brought Jack here to your door and carried him past the first line of defences, it is for you to do the rest."

"I hardly understand you."

"Take him to your daughter and let them settle the matter between them. It cannot end with such a letter as she has sent. She is evidently upset over something. If any man can put the matter right, he alone can. Take him straight to her."

"Do you wish to see Maude, Jack?"

"I do. It is the only thing left."

"I am afraid; you will do no good. She is by nature very firm—I might almost say obstinate—and I doubt if you will move her in the least degree."

"I can but try."

She thought a moment.

"Very well. Excuse us, Colonel Eustace." And a minute later she returned alone.

"They are together," she said, "but I fear he will do no good, now she has made up her mind. I assure you, Colonel Eustace, that this matter has grieved me more than words can tell."

"And me too, seeing how poor old Jack suffers from the blow."

"So quiet, so uncomplaining," echoed the lady.

It was no part of the Colonel's business to enlighten her regarding the nature of that morning's work. He merely added—

"Very much so. But how will it all end?"

"There will be no wedding."

"And you have no idea why this should have happened?"

"Not the least."

"Come, Mrs. Ashley," he said, "try your memory a little. Ladies have a keener insight into such matters than we men have. Who is the other man?"

She looked surprised.

"None that I know of."

"Yet there is one somewhere. Does she care—did she ever care a rap for Jack?"

"Sit down, won't you, Colonel Eustace? Your last question is rather a difficult one to answer. You see, you do not know my daughter as I do myself."

"No. But I am going to tell you something that I have never hinted to Jack himself. The first moment that I saw them together I hoped that this marriage would never take place."

"Colonel Eustace!"

"Don't let me shock you. I am old-fashioned enough in my ideas to believe that a certain amount of affection should enter into these matters. Mrs. Ashley, I assure you that your daughter has shown my cousin none."

Mrs. Ashley hardly knew what to think. Her first impression had been that this Machiavelian Colonel had come home with the deliberate intention of preventing the match. But a moment's reflection satisfied her that this could hardly be the case, more especially as the rupture had come from her daughter's side. Moreover, his last remark had reawakened sundry misgivings of her own.

"What makes you think that?" she asked.

"Everything I saw. Confess," he added triumphantly, "that you thought as much yourself."

"I cannot go so far as that, though I think I understand what you mean. But knowing more, as I do, I can understand your thinking it. She is a very peculiar girl in some respects, with very high aspirations in a way, the result of the somewhat unconventional way in which her poor father brought her up. But she has a heart of gold."

"In every human being there are two directing influences—the head and the heart. They cannot both rule; one must dominate the other. In Miss Ashley's case, which led her to accept my cousin?"

"The heart, I hope," she answered doubtfully.

"You are not quite sure, so we must go a little deeper. Has she strong religious leanings?"

"She has been carefully brought up."

"I don't doubt it; but that would not account for her undertaking to bury herself, for perhaps the rest of her life, in what I can safely aver by personal observation to be one of the most unsavoury parishes in the whole kingdom."

"Oh!" A light was breaking over the good lady's mind. "I begin to see what you mean. Maude is deeply read in social questions and has great ideas—so she often tells me—of living to be of some use to her fellow-men."

"Then I need ask no more. You have explained the whole thing. She did not want to marry my cousin, but his parish work."

"I am sure she liked and respected Jack immensely."

"Doubtless; but not enough to prevent her throwing him away like an old glove when she had done with him. Well, she is so far right, that there could by no possibility be a happy future before them on these terms. They are well out of it, and I wish you were."

"Why?"

"Because, my dear madam, a young lady who changes her fads—I beg your pardon, but the word is short and expresses what I mean—so suddenly, won't settle easily in life. You must not think me very curious if I add that I should very much like to know who the other man is, and what is his particular line."

"Why do you insist upon there being another man, Colonel Eustace? I don't know of any myself."

It was no part of the visitor's business to tell the anxious mother his conviction that a young lady who had once already acted on her own responsibility would most probably do so again, and that soon enough. He would, however, have much liked to discover if there was any ground for this theory which he had formed.

But before they could continue their conversation much longer, the door opened, and John Strachey walked in, looking, if possible, more woe-begone than ever. In answer to the question Mrs. Ashley put to him, he could only shake his head.

"We have said good-bye," was all his answer.

Neither of the others wished to press him. They both felt that, this was too delicate a question to discuss in public, as it were. So most of what had passed remained locked in his own bosom, though he afterwards told his cousin that their interview had been stormy, if short. Mrs. Ashley, who, in truth, stood not a little in awe of her masterful daughter, had contented herself with taking him to the door of Maude's study and leaving him there to shift for himself. The girl was writing letters, and was both angry and surprised at the intrusion. In vain John Strachey upbraided and implored by turns. She refused to listen to him or to add one word to her letter, and, finding her resolution was not to be shaken, he had left her and returned to the others.

But he had learned one thing in the course of his effort—that he had been engaged to a woman who

treated the whole matter from the callous standpoint of one who looked upon love as an idea beneath notice when compared to her pet theories regarding life, and the knowledge served to deaden the effect of the blow. To ordinary appeals to her honour, or to love, he had found her quite insensible. She simply could not see that she was doing anything wrong.

"It is all no use, dear Mrs. Ashley," he said presently. "Our hopes are at an end. Maude would not even listen to me, so I suppose we may say that the engagement has ceased."

"What reason did she give?" asked Eustace.

"That our affinities did not suit, and that the sphere of labour I offered her was not wide or useful enough."

The Colonel's mouth was twitching at the corners.

"Did she hint at having found any other, Jack?" he asked.

His cousin looked puzzled—then confused. But instantly he suppressed the outraged man and became the priest.

"What passed between us is sacred," he said, "Now my only thought and wish are for her happiness, for which I shall always pray."

"Then," remarked Eustace, taking up his hat, "it only remains for us to take our leave. Mrs. Ashley, good-bye. This has been a painful interview for all of us, most of all for you. I only hope, for your sake—if not for her own—that further experience may make your daughter a little more of a woman and a little less of a machine."

"Eustace!" cried John Strachey indignantly.

"Don't be alarmed, Jack. Mrs. Ashley understands perfectly what I mean, and I know agrees with me. I am a plain man myself, and don't believe in theories such as those on which, I fear, this young lady exists. They are often very pretty in books, but they seldom work in actual practice. A woman laying herself out to set the Thames on fire is even more likely to come to grief than a man is. I join with Jack here in hoping that this may never be Miss Ashley's fate."

He walked towards the door, but John Strachey caught him by the arm and brought him back.

"Frank, you are speaking in riddles. Tell us in plain English what you mean."

"Even at the risk of being unfair to Miss Ashley?"

"Yes, even on those conditions."

"Then here is my last warning. This scheme has fallen through, because a better offered. Perhaps Mrs. Ashley can tell us what it is. What has Miss Ashley been thinking about and talking about of late?"

"She has talked a great deal with Mr. Bacchus about India," replied the worthy lady, driven into a corner at last.

The change in the Colonel's manner was startling. He was grave enough now to satisfy any one.

"It were better," he said solemnly, as he held out his hand to say good-bye, "that a millstone were hanged about her neck, and that she were cast into the sea."

CHAPTER VII.

"OH, tell him!" roared the skipper on the bridge to the man in the steam launch. "Tell him that if he will bring a tape and measure his confounded thousand yards from the buoy, I will drop my anchor on the end of it." At least, that is what the Captain of the P. and O. steamer "Satowli" ought to have said. As a matter of fact, he said words to the same effect, only couched in language which will not bear repeating. Then, having satisfied himself that his anchor was all right, and his mind being relieved by his sarcasm, he went below.

After all, there was some excuse for his wrath. It is all very well in theory to say that a man should only swear when he breaks a bootlace, but, as John Strachey had found once already in the course of this tale, there are other occasions when weak humanity must perforce relieve its feelings by explosive language. A variety of things had combined to annoy the Captain that day. To begin with, he was carrying the yellow flag—afflicted, as it were, by the plagues of modern Egypt—as penalty for touching at a pest-smitten Red Sea port. Next, he was behind

time three good hours at a junction—for Aden is just as much a junction on the high seas as is Clapham itself on the rails. And, lastly, he had been annoyed by a combination of the health officer of the port and the P. and O. agent, who could not agree where he was to take up his moorings, having due regard to the quarantine regulations and the convenience of the company in transshipping its passengers and goods. First, sublimely unconscious that here his offence (the yellow flag) was “rank and smelled to heaven,” he had with all boldness dropped anchor alongside the two other steamers of his line, the one bound for Calcutta, the other for Bombay—neither of whom, by the way, had paid him, one of the senior servants of the P. and O., the compliment of dipping their flag. But no sooner was the anchor down than the health officer was up (in arms) adjuring him to go hence and get him outside the shipping away down in the bay. And when he had complied, and the tide had time to swing the great vessel’s head round in the wrong direction, up came the agent again in hot haste to know where he was going to next, and how he ever expected the good ship’s passengers to be transferred from such an out-of-the-way spot, he, of all people, who was already so much behind time. No wonder the Captain spoke out his mind, and then retired to solace his heated mind and body (for the weather was hot, too) in his cabin with a cooling draught of his particular fancy.

Colonel Eustace, C.B., standing on the ship’s quarter-deck, was an amused spectator of the scene. His baggage was already packed away beside the gang-

way, the obsequious steward had been fee'd, and he himself was awaiting the barge which was to carry him to his new ship. For he had travelled from Brindisi by the Australian mail steamer, and, if he wished to reach Bombay, must tranship to the "ferry-boat," as the indignant Anglo-Indian, reft of his direct communication with his native land, dubs the steamers which ply between Aden and Bombay. The puffing of the small craft which was to convey him and his fellow-passengers was audible from near at hand, and soon he would have made the change to the vessel which, in a week's time, would deposit him on the Apollo Bunder once again.

It was rather more than a month since he and John Strachey had walked out of the door of Maude Ashley's home, but neither he nor his cousin had heard anything more from either of the ladies, and in the hurry of fleeting time the Colonel only remembered them as the reason of his taking leave from India at all. For the rest, he and his cousin had seen but little of each other since the great catastrophe, the latter having chosen to bury himself 'alone in his east-end vicarage to try and forget his trouble in a special burst of hard work. And the Colonel had raised no demur, partly because he felt that it was the best thing possible under the circumstances, partly because he had other calls upon his time and other relations to visit whom he had promised to look up, once cousin Jack was safely wed. He had run down to the region of the docks the evening before he left London to spend a quiet evening with his smitten friend, had found him quiet and subdued, but in other

respects well, and never alluding to the past except by side shots such as that "a clergyman's first duty lay towards his flock."

"So all in love they parted," and now Colonel Eustace was once again in Aden—so to speak, in India itself.

He was not exactly sorry either. Men are very much creatures of habit, and as he clambered up the ship's side and gained the deck of the old "Siam," everything, from the white clothing of the ship's officers to the dusky faces of the Portuguese stewards, served to remind him that he was on familiar ground. It had been all very well for him to grumble to his cousin about his years of exile, but it was an exile which he, and many others of like kidney, loved, however much they might protest they did not. The hyper-civilisation of the old country has its disadvantages like everything else, and Colonel Eustace was fully alive to its faults. Given a fairly comfortable billet and a few nice friends, India became the summit of his wishes and desires.

To go below, seek out the steward, find his berth, and ascertain that he could not call to recollection any of the names in the passenger list, was with the Colonel a first duty. Then, having arranged his lighter packages most conveniently for himself and his berth-fellows, and having been altogether a matter of a quarter of an hour to twenty minutes below, he once again went on deck.

There is no opportunity at such times for going ashore, even if any one felt disposed to visit such a particularly uninviting spot as Aden is, viewed from

the sea. There was nothing to do but lounge about the deck, growl at the afternoon heat, which was oppressive at that time of the year, and watch the shipping in the harbour, notably our three big P. and O.'s, all getting up steam in readiness to be away to sea. Colonel Eustace found that most of the passengers were on deck. The steward had told him that they were pretty full, and as he cast his eye round the deck, which was somewhat smaller than that of the vessel he had just left, he was quite prepared to admit the possibility. The Calcutta boat, which had come by Marseilles, had been ahead of them, and her quota of passengers had already been some hours on board. Then there were also his own fellow-voyagers by the "Satowli," such of them, that is, as were bound for Bombay, the two groups being fairly easily distinguishable by their demeanour to each other, for not even the easy manner of India, where the address on the top of a bullock trunk is all that a traveller needs by way of introduction, had thawed the barriers which kept the two apart.

But presently the Colonel's eye, wandering round the deck in search of any acquaintance who might have come by the other boat, lighted on an object which caused him to start—a lady, young, fair, solitary, seated by herself in her own deck-chair, with no attendant cavalier or female satellite. This in itself was not so very remarkable, but the Colonel had a most uneasy sense that he knew who it was, although, there being no occasion for recognition just then, he kept his suspicions to himself.

But even while he was debating whether the thing

was possible, or whether the slightness of his acquaintance with the lady's appearance had not caused him to mistake this stranger for some one whom he ought to know, there came buzzing round the deck one of those choice spirits whose irrepressible nature compels them as a first duty to claim or scrape an acquaintance with every one they know or would like to know. On this occasion it was a callow youth, with fuzzy, brown hair and homely, round face—a kindly, well-disposed young fellow while held at a distance; apt, if admitted to closer intimacy, to degenerate into a bore. He, wandering around among this fresh contingent from the "Satowli," prowling, as it were, in search of fresh prey, spied among them Colonel Eustace, whom he knew to be a Simla somebody, and whom he therefore felt it his bounden duty to accost forthwith.

"How are yóu, Colonel?" quoth he cheerily, holding out a hand which Eustace took and shook gingerly, conscious that he had some sort of dim recollection of the man as of one given, in or out of season, to singing one solitary song, "The Friar of Orders Grey," a trifle out of tune. "How are you? I had no idea that you were on board this ship."

Our Colonel had forgotten the man's name, and did not greatly care if he ever remembered it again. But just then he could make him useful, and, moreover, he was never given to snubbing harmless folk such as this callow youth. To the said youth's great delight—for those who knew him better had been cold-shouldering him this hour or more—he smiled and answered what he could.

"Nor I that I should meet you. I suppose you

came by the 'Vienna'? There must have been a good lot of you on board."

"A goodish few. You see, many people who are not driven to haste prefer to travel when they can by Marseilles and not by that Italian journey."

"True. I don't seem to recognise many of them though."

"No. They are mostly 'griffs' going out for the first time, with a sprinkling of globe-trotters to fill up. Jones of the police is on board though—Jones of Meerut, you'll know him, of course—and —, and —," and so on through maybe a dozen names.

The Colonel listened without much interest while the callow youth—one Grainger, to wit, of the D.P.W.—prattled on, greatly delighted to have found at last that sympathetic listener whom he had been seeking in vain all the afternoon. But presently when Mr. Grainger had talked himself to a standstill, he put a question quietly, as if indifferent to the answer.

"By the way," he said, "who is the lady sitting aft yonder, just beside the wheel? Her appearance is somehow familiar to me."

The other eyed him askance.

"You're not the only man who wants to know, Colonel," was his answer. "I can tell you her name, and what she is said to be going out to Bombay for; at least, this last is 'gup,' for no one knows for certain what the truth is."

"Well?"

"She is a Miss Ashley. Do you know her?" for the other started as he spoke.

"Yes, we have met. Well, what is she going out for?"

"They say to marry a native."

"What?"

"Well, I can only tell you the story as it was told to me. She came on board with a parson and his wife going to Singapore, and being a good-looking girl, and seemingly unattached, several of the fellows tried to be civil" (here the callow one pulled up his own collar and looked hurt), "but she snubbed us all, and stuck to her parson and his wife. The latter told Mrs. Stanton—Stanton of the Bombay Cavalry, you know—what her errand was, whereupon the Indian ladies dropped her at once, and, if it's true, serve her right."

"I wonder if it is true," muttered the Colonel half to himself.

"Very little doubt about it, I am afraid," replied Grainger; "but, if so, it is an awful pity. She is a good-looking girl too, and the parson told me she was very nice, but he was as close as an oyster himself, and would not be drawn as to how she came across her native husband that-is-to-be."

"Not very hard to guess that," said Eustace quietly, "seeing, as one does, how they have managed to get into every class of society at home, and how people there accept them as what they seem to be, and not as what we know they are. But, like you, I shall hope that your story is not correct, and I——" he was just going to add "shall take early steps to ascertain," when fortunately, as it turned out, the bore espied another victim too favourably placed to be neglected.

"Is not that Griffith?" he asked, pointing to another of the "Satowli" passengers who had just come on deck.

"Yes, it is," replied the Colonel.

"Then I must go and shake hands with him. Good-bye for the present, Colonel. Awfully glad to find you on board. It makes such a difference who one's fellow-passengers are."

And off he bolted, much to Eustace's relief. But still, once he had touched Indian soil, the Colonel's luck had begun again. For, though Grainger was small and unimportant, it is always better to make a friend than an enemy, and little Grainger spent the rest of the afternoon and evening telling everybody that "he was so glad to find Colonel Eustace on board. A real good fellow, Eustace, with no stuck-up nonsense about him. Shook hands as if he was glad to see you, and does not bite your head off like *some* people do. But then he's one of the best sort. Otherwise they would not be so careful to keep him always in the Simla ring—you bet."

Colonel Eustace had a deck-chair on board as well as everybody else, and he was not slow after this episode to get it out and turn it into such a position as to be free from interruption. He got out a book too, and even pretended to read. But he was not reading; he was wondering how Maude Ashley had managed to put this last mad scheme into such speedy execution, and what John Strachey would say of this strange development of the situation if it ever reached his ears. Yet he was not as surprised as he ought to have been, for, to tell the truth, a faint expectation

of something of the sort, only, of course, not nearly so swiftly done, had been in his mind for the last month or more. Filled with indignation and sorrow—for he was angry not only at the linking of white and brown, but was, as a good-hearted man ought to be, thoroughly apprehensive regarding what would be this unlucky girl's fate in her new career—he set to work to try and think out what was his own duty in the matter, and his way out of the complications which this last development of his late experiences had produced. Somehow, now that he was once again in India, the natural good-nature of the man reasserted itself, and he felt less angry with this girl who had wrought such havoc of his cousin's life, and more inclined to pity the ignorance which was leading her into what his experience told him to be a truly terrible mess. And then, as he let his kinder feelings have free play, he began to be stirred by hot indignation at the treatment already meted out to her in anticipation of her offence. It was, he considered, the duty of her own sex not to turn their backs upon her in scorn, but to put before her all the objections to what she was proposing to do.

And so very speedily, and by an insensible train of thought, he was brought to think of what was his own duty in the matter, and to ask the all-important question whether he (so far as in him lay) ought not to do his best to bring home to her, poor, foolish theorist, the error of her ways. Before the hour for dinner had arrived, he had made up his mind that it was his duty, as her only friend on board, at all events, to try, and that the first step would be to

endeavour to gain her confidence, if even that were possible in view of the dislike she had shown of accepting the advances of all the other men on board.

The opportunity came sooner than he hoped. When he entered the saloon for dinner he found most of his fellow-passengers were already seated, and among them Miss Ashley, sitting by herself with one vacant chair on her right hand and two on her left. Without a moment's hesitation he took the former seat, thereby at once destroying her isolation from the others and establishing himself in the post of vantage by her side.

CHAPTER VIII.

COLONEL EUSTACE'S little manoeuvre had not failed to attract the attention of many keen eyes at the table, and to provoke wrath and indignation in the breast of more than one matron with married or marriageable daughters, whose husbands were worthy men struggling with undeserved adversity, or, at all events, undeserved, obscurity. In an Aden-Bombay ferry-boat one is all but in India itself, and the ways of Indian society at once begin to assert themselves. The man Grainger's loquacity had made good any shortcomings in the matter of want of knowledge as to the identity of this favourite of the gods—for was not Colonel Eustace, C.B., a prominent member of the Simla inner circle, a man favoured with the confidence of Excellencies and Honours, and enjoying the ear of the dispensers of well-paid billets? Many a man and woman among the passengers, who, either personally or by relation-deputy, suffered from the inconveniences of ill-paid service in a bad climate, turned an eye longingly on the man whose little whispered recommendation was supposed to be able to work a miraculous removal to more eligible

appointments, and more than one had privately cherished the hope that a good fortune would seat the gallant Colonel next to him or her in order that in that forcing-house of friendships, a sea voyage, the seed might be sown which, in due season, should bear such desirable fruit. And now, to their horror and dismay, this rank outsider, this something—well, this woman (spoken with bitter scorn), who was supposed to be going out to India for the purpose of disgracing herself and her race, had got the great man all to herself.

Nor was their consternation lessened when they discovered that the Colonel was evidently quite at home—knew what he was doing, and had, in fact, done it on purpose. Moreover, this good-looking adventuress (no one could dispute the good points of her personal appearance) was no stranger to the man who had sat down next to her so inopportunately, as was testified by the start of surprise and the look of scared recognition with which she answered his greeting.

“Good evening, Miss Ashley,” quoth Colonel Eustace, as he seated himself by her side.

“Colonel Eustace, is it really you?”

“Yes, it is, on my way back from leave,” he answered. “This is a pleasant surprise. I was just wondering whom I knew on board, and I find you here. I suppose that you came by the ‘Vienna’?”

“Yes. I was told that it is the best plan for a lady travelling alone to come all the way by sea. Besides, I knew a clergyman and his wife going to Australia.”

“I hope you have had a pleasant voyage so far?”

"Very; but I miss my friends, now they are gone."

"You will do that; but eight days is not a long time before you reach Bombay, and we must try to make your journey as agreeable as we can. It is a great nuisance changing ships, is it not?"

Miss Ashley agreed, and then they fell to discussing all sorts of safe topics—such as teetotalism in India *versus* temperance, the climate, the probability of the weather holding good—everything, in fact, except John Strachey and the doings of a month ago. For Maude Ashley chose to ignore the subject, and it was no part of the Colonel's plan to set to work to rake up old scores. He had a double object in view—one part practical, the other quixotic. He wanted to make the last few days of happiness (for such he honestly believed them to be if she persisted in her supposed intention) as pleasant as he could to the girl, and he wished, if he got the chance, to shake her in her fatal determination of plunging light-heartedly into this abyss of the black depths of which she knew or guessed so little.

Eustace had little enough cause to like this girl or to go out of his way to lend her a helping hand, but he was a thoroughly good-hearted man, and he had grasped the situation and all its dangers with the readiness of an active brain. He knew that Maude was a theorist, a girl just a little *tête montée* from her own success, and more than the average anxious to set the Thames on fire. He knew, too, the class of temptation to which she had been exposed by the man who was going to make her his victim—the glowing picture of a grand and useful life which had been

painted by that glib Mohammedan tongue; the many advantages unfolded, the one great and insurpassable obstacle, namely, union with a native, glossed over or held back.

In England a native dressed in English clothes in the English style, with his ready wit and smooth tongue, seems often to the ignorant a more than passable individual. It needs a residence in countries where the native is at home (either East or West) to understand the obstacles to such a union as Maude Ashley was contemplating, to comprehend the difficulties and disabilities, which are by no means the creation of an obstinate and selfish European class prejudice, as some would wrongfully assert.

Maude Ashley, for her part, was not at all unwilling to accept the advances. The girl felt singularly isolated on board this new ship. She had parted with the last of her friends on the "Vienna," and though no one had told her as much in words, it was idle for her to attempt to disguise from herself the fact that her fellow-passengers eyed her askance. Home, the happy home of her girlhood, was receding day by day as the distance from England increased, and perhaps she would never see it again. The future, which had seemed so full of usefulness and credit, was beginning to loom a little darkly as the end of her journey approached, and she was in no mood to turn her back upon any one who was inclined to be friendly to herself. She knew little of Colonel Eustace personally, but she had heard a great deal of him from John Strachey during the brief days of that ill-fated courtship. If only he would avoid the one subject on

which they could never hope to agree, they might manage to be friends for this short week, before she plunged into her new career, and, in any case, his countenance would protect her on board the "Siam" from the unconcealed sneers of the rest of the company. Certainly, as she was delighted to find, there were no signs of Eustace's alluding to that unhappy ending of an episode which she was doing her best to forget. And though it puzzled her a little that he, of all men in the world, should be going out of his way to be friendly to her, she was content to accept the fact, and to make the best of it while it should last. And Eustace, for his part, was behaving like an angel, and, in place of being a visible reproach to her for her treatment of his cousin, was doing his best to make himself agreeable. Little did she suspect that his kindness was due to his anxiety to be helpful to the woman whom John Strachey had honoured with his love.

So the dinner passed off pleasantly enough. The Colonel's right-hand neighbour was a phlegmatic Teuton travelling in the interests of some brand of lager beer, who paid too much attention to his food to want to talk, and the pair were therefore able to converse without interruption. So, for the first time for the last fortnight or more, Maude was able to enjoy the conversation of a man of her own class. Ungrateful as it seems to say so, the parson and his good wife had been people of unusually narrow views, and as such had wearied the lady double-first not a little.

The couple sat on after some of the others had left

the table, and the first interruption came from no less a person than the Captain of the "Siam" himself. Captain Nichols was a kindly Scotsman, and happened to be an old friend of Eustace's, who had chanced to sail with him twice or more before. He had not known the Colonel was on board, or he would have taken care to place him near himself at table, but, noticing the interest this couple were creating, he too had looked and seen, and now when he rose from table his first thought had been to come across and upbraid his faithless friend.

"Come, Colonel," he said, "this is hardly fair; you have deserted me altogether this time. Were you avoiding me on purpose?"

Eustace swung round on his chair and shook the skipper cordially by the hand.

"No, indeed, Nichols," he answered; "but when I came in all the places were full, and, happening to spy Miss Ashley here—I don't think you know Captain Nichols, Miss Ashley, do you?—I sat down next to her."

The Captain shook his lady passenger by the hand.

"No," said he, "we have not had you with us before. Indeed, I doubt if you have ever been in India."

"No, I have not."

"I thought so," as if a glance at the girl's healthy face was not proof positive, and there was some merit in the discovery just made. "Well, I daresay it won't be the last time either. I shall look out for you both on deck later on. I have to go on the bridge for a short while now."

"Evidently," thought Eustace, "he knows nothing of the cloud over this unhappy girl, or, if he does, being a man, he can afford to be more generous than her own sex." Then he proposed to move.

"Come," he said, "it is a lovely night. Shall we go on deck and make the most of it?"

"I will fetch a shawl and join you," she answered, as they rose together.

Somehow for the first time in her life she felt a little humbled and a good deal thankful for the protecting presence of a man. The sense of isolation was strong upon her that evening, and she had noticed and been puzzled by the tacit avoidance of every one else on board, which had throughout the afternoon made itself felt in various ways. She hurried away to fetch her shawl, while Eustace strolled up on to the deck, to be beset by various men and women anxious to rescue him from the baleful influence under which he had fallen. But the Colonel was not to be shaken in his allegiance. He brushed them all away one after another, and, having found his own chair, placed it beside Miss Ashley's, out of which he hunted a couple of urchins who had made it their own during the dinner hour, and so arranged everything to his own satisfaction pending the girl's arrival.

Do what they will, the weaker sex, struggling so desperately in these latter days to become, not the equals, as they pretend, but the masters, cannot manage without the assistance of their male belongings. It pleased the girl, little as she would have been prepared to confess it, to find everything ready and arranged to her liking, and a most eligible

cavalier to talk to during the interval before bed-time. Certainly the Colonel was her good genius on that lovely night, for before long the skipper made his appearance, and plumped himself down on a bench beside them—as, indeed, Eustace had foreseen and arranged for, and they three began to chat. Maude felt that she owed it to her friend to do her best that night, and she exerted herself to the utmost, astonishing the Colonel and showing him for the first time wherein lay the attractions which had taken his cousin's fancy. Seamen are always gallant, and sturdy Nichols was only too ready to be amused, and next (wonder of wonders) one man after another deserted his proper feminine belongings and came across to join this merry group (but no women as yet, as the Colonel grimly remarked to himself), and they lighted their pipes, and drank their weak Indian "pegs," and chatted and generally enjoyed themselves. Among the first came Grainger, unwontedly subdued and grateful to be admitted to the circle of the gracious knight and beauteous dame, and, when pressed by the former to sing them something, volunteered them "The Friar of Orders Grey," and, what is more, got through it with not much more than his average of false notes; and Eustace sang as well, and Nichols spun a yarn, and some one else fetched a banjo and sang half a dozen of those plantation songs which are the joy of the unfledged ensign, but set his senior's teeth on edge.

And last of all came the triumph of the whole evening for the Colonel and his protégée. Argus-eyed Grainger, harmless busybody that he was, had

seen among the lady's baggage somewhere a mandolin, and, having compelled the confession that she both played and sang, volunteered to bring it, brought it in a trice. And now, behold the whole deck listening, foe as well as friend, while the outcast sang, in a glorious voice that no one had suspected her of possessing, one or two simple old ballads, winding up with "Home, Sweet Home" itself, at the ending whereof old Nichols brushed away a tear (tender-hearted salt that he was), and while the rest applauded vociferously, the Colonel said "Thank you" somewhat huskily, for he was thinking of the home that the girl had left, and of what her new home—save the mark!—was like to be.

Then, amidst a chorus of most cordial "good nights," Maude prepared to retire below. Little Grainger, wishing that he had not made an ass of himself by singing that beastly "Friar" all out of tune, would permit no one but himself to restore the mandolin, once more safe in its case, to its resting-place outside the cabin, and for that purpose followed Miss Ashley down to the saloon. The rest sat silent, and (if it must be confessed) just a little subdued, being strangely moved by that simple word "home," which never means so much to anybody as to those who have just turned their backs on home for a longer or shorter term.

Silent and moody they remained a space, till presently Grainger returned from his errand down below, and it fell to him to strike the first jarring note. As he took his seat again, he put a question to Eustace—

"Colonel, who is Miss Ashley?"

"*The* Miss Ashley," replied the Colonel quietly, as if there were only one in the world. And while the rest sat wondering, a young Oxford man on the very outskirts of the crowd—one of the "heaven-born" as they call them—a newly-caught legislator making his way to India for the first time, caught the name and exclaimed—

"What, *the* Miss Ashley?"

"Precisely," answered the Colonel, glad to find corroboration so near at hand.

"But we are not so learned as you two gentlemen," quoth Skipper Nichols. "Colonel, pray explain!"

"She took firsts in two separate Triposes at Cambridge last year," replied Eustace, and wonder fell upon them all.

But Grainger, the irrepressible, who had no finer feelings, wanted to know something else.

"And is she really going to marry the native?" he asked.

"That," said the Colonel in his most freezing tones, which made the wretched busybody feel as if some one was pouring iced-water down his back, "I cannot tell you. She herself did not say so, and it was no business of mine to ask her."

Whereupon a silence fell upon them all, and they began to think of going to bed.

CHAPTER IX.

COLONEL EUSTACE'S misgivings regarding the behaviour of the lady passengers on board the "Siam" were fully justified. The sex is proverbially unforgiving towards an erring sister; and as nothing transpired to contradict the ugly rumour—hideous in their eyes—that Miss Ashley was going out to India to marry a native, they continued to hold aloof themselves (of course, compelling their male belongings to follow suit), and sniffed virtuously whenever their honest, commonplace eyes fell on this disgrace to her sex. Lacking the charity of the man of the world who had thrown his protection over the girl, and who hoped that even now at the eleventh hour it might be possible to rescue her from the pit into which she was deliberately casting herself, they could only think of the offence and rigorously shut their eyes to their own duty in the matter. The company on board were not, unfortunately, of the sort from whom Eustace could hope to recruit a lady ally in the good work to which he had (as he told himself), from pure philanthropy, devoted himself. One or two high-dried female specimens of the genus Anglo-Indian,

three or four underbred women married to lesser officials, and a sprinkling of globe-trotters who did not know or care enough about the subject to make them of any use—such were hardly what he wanted. True, the ladies were too wise in their generation to openly quarrel with anybody who might at some time have a directing voice in the fate of their scattered male belongings, but they relieved their feelings by hating Maude Ashley with a double intensity for annexing the most useful man on board—one whom they would have dearly liked to take to their bosoms and cherish with a view to future benefits to their own.

Nor did the Colonel deem it wise to enlist the sympathies of any of the men, which, in itself, was proof positive of the way his own feelings were working. He determined from the first that he must undertake this task by himself, and that speedily. Eight days was not a long time in which to convert distrust—open and pronounced—into such confidence as would enable him to deliver with effect the blow which he hoped would be fatal to Miss Ashley's schemes. He pretended that his action was quixotic—perhaps some people might be inclined to call it unnecessary, and even impertinent—but, while recognising the truth, he was not a man to allow himself to be stopped by hard words. He understood too well what the girl was going to do, understood all the impossibilities which lay in her path, understood best of all the temptations to which her naturally ambitious nature had exposed her, and knew quite well her absolute ignorance of the future

which would be her's as Mowlah Bux's wife. He excused his going out of his way to help one who had but little claim on him—rather the contrary, in fact—by saying that it was the duty of every decent man to lend a hand to a woman in trouble (even if she did not know it herself), and quite ignored the all-important fact that every day that he passed in the society of this young and fascinating girl increased the interest he took in her and in her fate. And in this spirit he set to work to oppose his practical knowledge to her crude theories, with a view to upset the latter if he could.

And he had only eight days in which to work the change, a time long enough to be fatal to him without greatly benefiting her. Every hour of those eight days brought him nearer to Bombay—and Mowlah Bux. Could he only have started in England, where home influences, the long journey, the separation, the prospect of a plunge into the great unknown, would all have been powerful allies in his task, he might have succeeded. But only eight days, close to the end of the long journey, were far too short a time in which to bring to her senses a girl too clever to be talked out of her convictions, too young to understand her danger, and too successful hitherto to believe that she could be going to fail. And yet with all these obstacles he went very near success.

Indeed, he prospered beyond all hope. The action of their fellow-passengers had cut these two off as completely as if they had been on an island in mid-ocean instead of on a crowded mail steamer. The result came speedily. The man was eager in his

task, and, like all crusaders, enthusiastic in the good cause; the girl was genuinely grateful for his kindness, and, moreover, her new surroundings had invigorated her, and the fresh sea breezes had swept some of the cobwebs out of her head. There is no saying what might not have happened had not the image of John Strachey risen like a grim avenging angel to exact the full measure of retaliation for his own wrongs. So six days passed, and only two remained; then one, and then the harbour—that is to say, the end. That last was a lovely day such as one gets in the Indian Ocean, hot perhaps, but the ship's motion gave a pleasant breath of air. There was not a ripple on the water, not a quiver of the big vessel, only the tireless throbbing of the engines amidships, which was hardly noticed by people travelling this three weeks and more.

Eustace felt the time had come when it must be a case of now or never. He must strike home this morning or for ever hold his peace, and fortunately these two solitary individuals had been growing more and more confidential every day they had been together, and when he sought out Maude Ashley for the purpose of testing his week's work, he found her sitting, as usual, in the most convenient spot for his purpose, as far removed as possible from the eager ears of any whom he did not wish to overhear their conversation. So far, all was in his favour, and drawing his chair as close as he could to hers, he prepared for his last great throw.

"Has it ever struck you, Miss Ashley," he began, "that you don't seem to hit it off very well with the other ladies on board?"

The fact was self-evident, but he chose the subject as one leading up to what he had to say.

A bright flush spread over the girl's face.

"They don't seem to wish to hit it off with me," she answered.

"And yet Indian society is to the last degree sociable, whatever its other faults."

A pause, he meaning to go on; she undecided whether to speak or not. Finally, she decided on the former course.

"It was just the same on the 'Vienna.'"

"And what do you suppose is the cause?"

A very unkind question, to be parried or answered straight.

"Don't *you* know?"

"I? I shut my ears to women's chatter. Besides, I have never cared to ask, since, to be honest, it involves a question which must rake up memories painful to me, and I hope to you as well."

"Colonel Eustace, you have made me change my opinion of you."

"I am glad of it, but may I ask why?"

"When I first saw you, I had made up my mind that you were the most conceited man I had ever met."

"Thank you for the confession—which is all the more remarkable, as I had formed a precisely similar opinion of you."

"And have you, too, changed your opinion?"

"*Place aux dames*. You began, and must finish first. So I will ask, have you?"

"Yes, unhesitatingly, yes. You have shaken my faith in my own judgment wonderfully. You, of

all people in the world, had the least reason to be kind to me, because—I am going to be open with you—my behaviour to your cousin had not been what you could approve. You thought me a heartless, fickle jilt, did you not?”

“Why rake up the past? Like you, I have changed my opinion to some extent, though not quite so fully as you have. But let us leave poor Jack and his troubles out of the question. We cannot undo the past.”

“No. And that is why I wonder at your forgiving me. But in what respects has your opinion of me remained unshaken?”

“I still think you the most con—no, that won’t do—the most self-confident young lady of my acquaintance.”

“In what way?”

“In the career you have laid down for yourself,” he answered quietly.

“And are you sure you know what that is?” she asked quickly.

“I wish I were sure. The possibilities have been haunting me since——”

“Since when?” she asked, as he hesitated.

“Since the last day that I called at your house, the day after Jack and I came home from Harrogate.”

The girl looked confused.

“Come,” she said, “I see that you evidently know a little and have guessed the rest. I will make a free confession. Mr. Bacchus is waiting to marry me to-morrow in Bombay.”

“My God! is it really true then?”

The expression told better than words could have done how all along the man had been clinging to the hope that the report might be false, and told her, too, that other secret which he did not confess as yet even to himself, namely, how deeply this girl's future interested him. But the startling energy of the oath, the grim sternness of the query, left no doubt in Maude's mind of his being deeply moved. She did not guess the first reason, but attributed his emotion to the last. Mother Eve has implanted in the bosoms of every one of her daughters certain notions from which the very wisest of them signally fail to shake themselves free. She thought the Colonel was yet another victim to her personal fascinations, and had very properly succumbed in seven days—no uncommon thing in hot climates, which are forcing-houses of all seeds, good or bad. Wrapped up in her "mission," she herself had never contemplated any such ending to their friendship as this, and the enlightenment rather shocked her.

"What difference does it make to you?" she asked, feeling a little scared.

"This much, Miss Ashley. Do you think that I am capable of feeling any interest in the welfare of another human being, yourself for instance?"

"I hope so."

"Then may I tell you what is my advice to you?"

"Do. I should like to hear it immensely."

"Here it is. Jump overboard at once."

"What *do* you mean?"

"That it would be far better for you to end your life in mid-ocean than to do this wicked, this preposterous thing which you are proposing."

"Colonel Eustace, you must not speak to me like this."

But he was not to be stopped.

"Miss Ashley, what makes you do this thing?"

"What right have you to ask the question?"

"None legally, or from the society standpoint, but morally the right of one who sees clearly enough the position in which you stand. Come, I am not a very old man, but I know and understand this thing, which you do not. I understand your motives also, which every one might not be able to do. When you contracted to marry my cousin, it was because you ignored the man, and thought everything of the career such a marriage offered you, deny it as you may. And just so now, the man in your eyes is of less account: the opening for a life of usefulness turns the scale. You are well read, primed to your fingertips with all the latest theories of social regeneration, burning to take part in so good a work; but you are utterly, hopelessly unskilled in reading your fellow-men. That glib hypocrite—for a native masquerading in English society is ninety-nine times out of a hundred a hypocrite from his hat to his boots—has filled your head with pictures as lying as his words. He has drawn a life for you which not only does not exist, but which cannot hope to exist in your time or in his. He has flattered your self-esteem, drawn glowing pictures of your future career of greatness, which he can no more effect than I can. Above all, he has glossed over the truth, which he does not mean you to find out till it is too late. What do you know about him? His own account? So far trustworthy that I, who have met him but once, can tell

you more about him by virtue of my knowledge of his race and their ways than you can hope to discover till long after the knowledge will be too late. Has he told you that he is a great man in his own country? So much the worse for you if it is true. And if he is not, it means that he hopes to make you the lever to that notoriety which, among his people, is the key-stone of success. The man who has married an English lady—that is how he wants to be known, and very likely he will profit through it among the least reputable of his own people. But at what a cost to you! Can't you see how the mere suggestion of what is coming drives all these Pharisees in petticoats to avoid you as they would a leper?" A sudden thought struck him. "Why were you not married from your mother's house?"

"Mr. Bacchus thought it would be better to be married in Bombay, especially as he had to hurry home to make arrangements and acquaint his family."

"A very transparent falsehood. He dreaded the voyage with you as his wife; thought you might perhaps turn him adrift at Bombay. By the way, under what rites are you to be married?"

"What do you mean? In a church, of course."

"Excuse me, but there is, unfortunately, no 'of course' about it. Had you married a Roman Catholic, you would have to be married in his chapel; and since you are marrying a Mohammedan, there is just as much reason why you should be married by a mollah in a mosque as by a parson in your own parish church."

"Mr. Bacchus himself suggested the church. His views are very liberal."

"Lax, you mean; lax as you like in London, and perhaps in Europeanised Bombay. But wait till he gets you to his home. Where is that, by the way?"

"Khurruckpore."

"Great Cæsar! The most fanatical town in Upper India, swarming with bigots of his creed—worthy enough men of themselves, but no fit associates for you."

"There will be, I suppose, the ladies of the family to associate with, and the people with whom they visit. He has a mother living and a married sister as well."

But the Colonel rose to leave her, his heart fairly gnawing itself away in blind, hopeless despair. He saw now how well the ground had been prepared—how completely the task was beyond his powers in the time at his disposal.

"Miss Ashley, these are all untruths, not so much in the actual words as in the deductions drawn from them. I dare not trust myself to say more now. I dare not even trust myself to stay any longer here with you, for fear my indignation gets the better of me. But let me say just this much. If you don't believe me, if you think me bigoted, prejudiced, my pictures of your future unhappiness false and overdrawn, at least do this much to test them. Postpone your marriage for a year, a month, a week, even for a day, but let that one day be spent in an up-country Zenana mission, visiting, learning, talking to ladies experienced in India and her ways. But don't decide till then."

"That is out of the question. My word is passed. To-morrow night I shall be Mr. Bacchus' wife."

"Then Heaven help you," he groaned, and walked away.

For the first time since she had taken this mad idea into her head, Maude Ashley's resolution was shaken. The fact that this last friend of her own race and creed had turned his back upon her, or, if not quite so bad as that, had left her in sorrowing indignation at what he honestly believed to be her coming fate, had troubled her more than all that had gone before—her mother's remonstrances, the mildly hinted warnings of her parson friend and his good wife, the social ostracism extended to her by two separate sets of passengers. She would have liked to call the Colonel back and ask another question or two, but he was gone elsewhere to seek what solitude he could find, and smoke endless "Trichis" and curse the obstinate fate which had got him into such an *impasse* as this had become. She hoped to see him at lunch, but he never came, and when he did appear at dinner, she did not like, *coram publico*, to ask the questions which were on the tip of her tongue. And in the evening, the last of the voyage, there was a sort of sing-song on deck in which he was taking part, so that after all she never got a word with him alone. She did manage, however, to say good night, and, in doing so, to ask him if he would kindly see her ashore next day.

"Mr. Bacchus may not be able to be there," she said, with a blush.

"So even that is uncertain," he thought; but out loud he answered, "Certainly, with the greatest pleasure in the world."

CHAPTER X.

IT was very late that night before Colonel Eustace turned in. This last request of Maude's had set him thinking over very many things which he would have been only too glad to have left alone. Hopeless as he considered the situation, powerless as he felt himself to do anything that could really assist this foolish victim of her own wild theories, there was something else which kept the matter ever present in his mind. Eustace was a man of close on forty years of age, who, in the course of a busy life, had never yet found time to devote to the common occupation of looking for a wife. But like all men who remain heartwhole till they are verging on middle age, the disease, when once it did attack him, developed with startling rapidity. Still, a week is not a very long period in which to abandon the convictions of a lifetime; and the Colonel, although greatly attracted by Maude Ashley, and doubly exposed to danger by his being engaged in a chivalrous attempt to rescue the girl from impending ruin, yet hesitated to take the final plunge—to make her that proposal which, if she accepted it, would offer her the readiest chance of escape.

But what was his difficulty? It was twofold, part arising from his own self, part from his strong affection for his cousin. When a man is past the first flush of youth and has turned five-and-thirty, every day he puts off marrying makes the operation more difficult to achieve. To begin with, he creates for himself a purely imaginary bogey, in the shape of a belief that he is best suited to bachelor life, and has grown too old to marry at all. Then he grows more diffident of his own chances, more sensitive to what his friends will say; his vanity prevents his running the risk of a snubbing; his selfishness makes him hesitate about committing his happiness to another's charge. If all these objections hold good in ordinary cases, how much more in this one? To marry meant to create a clean revolution in all his habits, and a terrible stumbling-block in his beloved career, for he could no longer pack his trunk and go away anywhere at a moment's notice when he had a wife, and possibly a family, to consider as well as himself.

These were the considerations which rose up in Eustace's mind as, at the end of seven days in Maude Ashley's society, he asked himself whether he liked the girl well enough to risk all on one last desperate effort to save her in spite of herself.

And while he was hesitating, there rose up in judgment against Maude Ashley in this crisis of her fate the memory of her past misdeeds. Six weeks ago she had been affianced to his cousin, whom she had jilted, and now her salvation lay in jilting yet another man. And Colonel Eustace, as he paced the deck in

solitary misery far into the night, had asked himself this question—would so changeable a woman be worth the sacrifice which he had almost nerved himself to make? Her position as his wife would be a good one, for he was well-to-do and a rising man; on that score he had no cause to hesitate. But how about saddling himself with such a dangerous encumbrance as a wife who never knew her own mind for a month together, who had been, so to speak, fed and nourished all her life on fads and fancies, till at last she was too fickle, too flighty, to ever give hopes of settling down? Hardly the woman to introduce into Indian society, with its deadly low-level sameness and its easy social ways. What began with an eight days' courtship might end by a nine days' scandal, and there lay the rub. And while chivalry was wrestling with prudence, the image of John Strachey rose to block the way. How could he ever look his cousin in the face again if he did this thing?

In fact, there could be but one ending to this business—he must let it go, regretting they had ever crossed each others' paths. Had he travelled with the girl all the way from Marseilles, the extra week might have just turned the scales; but time was all against Maude Ashley, and before the Colonel turned in (long after every one else) his mind was made up—she must take her chance. He could not further interfere.

And in this frame of mind he greeted Maude next morning, with Bombay lighthouse on their port bow. The girl was nervous and anxious for that guiding word which never came; the man was courteous but reserved.

And so they were when the steam launch came alongside to take the passengers ashore. The Colonel had offered to see her right to her hotel—not Watson's (Mowlah Bux was too clever for that), but a quieter hostelry, under native management, nearer the terminus of the railway—and she had accepted his offer gratefully, for now that the supreme moment had arrived, she was nervous, almost afraid.

The big steamer dropped her anchor very early in the morning, and it was not yet eight o'clock when the steam launch deposited them at the *bunder*. Eustace had arranged that Maude's luggage was to be taken ashore with his own by his agents, and delivered at her hotel. The start with which he had received the news of her destination in no way added to her comfort; it so plainly expressed his conviction that the place was unsuitable for her. But he made no further comment on the arrangement, and she did not dare to ask him what he thought of it.

There are few things in this life which strike the novice more forcibly than a first arrival at Bombay. The whole place is so different from what one sees elsewhere. But these two paid little heed to their surroundings on this occasion—the man too accustomed to such scenes to notice them, the girl too full of misgivings to have any attention for anybody except their two selves.

As they entered the carriage the Colonel tried to be cheerful.

"Well," said he, "I imagine it will be some little time before we meet again, Miss Ashley."

"I hope not. You have been very kind to me,

Colonel Eustace, this last week—far kinder than I deserved or had any right to expect; and I should be really ungrateful if I did not hope that we should see more of each other in the immediate future.”

“That is to the last degree improbable.”

“Why so?” she asked a little nervously.

“Because, in the first place, India is a big country. Khurruckpore and Simla lie many hundred miles apart.”

“But you may come to me or I go to you,” she urged.

“Yes, though either contingency is to the last degree doubtful. But there are other and graver barriers which will keep us apart.”

“And what are they?”

“Would it not be better for you to find them out for yourself? I am firmly persuaded that they exist; but if I were to tell them to you now, you would think I was exaggerating, and, besides, they might give you pain and darken what is, I suppose, really your wedding day.”

Maude Ashley gave a slight shudder. This was putting the matter plainly, with a vengeance. Girls will be girls all the world over; and, in spite of her education among the learned professors, this young lady had at times pictured to herself a wedding in which there were bridesmaids and orange blossoms, tearful relatives and smiling kindly friends, and herself in a bridal veil. And now she glanced at the cool travelling dress she wore. Was that to be her bridal dress? It was all so different from what it ought to have been. And then, too, there would be only her

husband's mother and sisters in place of her own. Well, of course, under the circumstances, it could not be helped.

Even as she sat silent, the Colonel pointed out a square, ugly building which they were passing.

"That, Miss Ashley, is the church," he said.

She glanced up at it.

"You are joking," she said.

"Hardly. Perhaps it does not strike you as very churchlike, but the building is constructed rather for convenience than for show."

A sudden thought struck him.

"And are you to be married this morning?" he asked.

"That depends if Mr. Bacchus has really arrived."

"So even that is doubtful," he thought, "and this poor white slave, who is giving herself to what she cannot realise, may have to spend two or three days awaiting the convenience of her dusky lord." But out loud he only said, "Miss Ashley, it is perhaps a strange offer for me to make, but would it be any comf——, I should say convenience, to you, if I were present at your wedding?"

She looked at him, her eyes filled with tears called up suddenly by this fresh proof of kindness to her, who felt so friendless just then, but she only shook her head.

"No, no," she answered, "I could not—like it; thank you very much, all the same."

Shade of outraged John Strachey! Why must you be sitting opposite to this pair? But for you the Colonel would do what he will regret to his dying day

he has not done; tell the jarvey to turn his horses' heads towards Watson's hotel, and let Mr. Bacchus cool his heels at the dirty native hostelry to the end of time if he likes, at any rate till it pleases him to take himself home to Khurruckpore. Pity tells the man to save this poor girl in spite of herself; prudence says "think"; and memory says "no"—and memory, aided by the phantom presentment of John Strachey seated before him, carries the day.

But he sees the girl's distress, and he determines to profit by it. He calls to the native driver to take them into some gardens, famed for their beauty and much affected by the holiday-makers of Bombay, which are close at hand. The day is yet young, and he will have one more try.

"Come," he says, as they drive in among the cool paths flanked by heavily-watered flowerbeds, "I must have a word with you before we go further. Miss Ashley, won't you think better of it and take my advice?"

"What advice?"

"To see a little before you finally commit yourself, to find out something of what lies before you, to let some friend—myself, failing any other—make inquiries regarding this Mowlah Bux and his position and antecedents, about which you know nothing but his unsupported statement."

"What would you have me do?"

"Go to some European——"

"Where, Colonel Eustace?"

"Here, if you like."

"But to whom?"

The question was a facer. Teeming Bombay lay around them; but Eustace was a Bengal man himself, and had heaps of friends north of Mother Ganges, but none on this side.

"I don't know actually anybody here——," he began.

"Exactly. Nor do I." She has perceived his plan of going off the road by this time, for the dusky driver has checked his horses to a walking pace, and is slowly travelling round and round the somewhat garish fountain in the centre which the natives so admire. "Please do not let us wait here. Drive on."

Why does he not let out the words which are hovering on his lips? Because the memory is there still. John Strachey, honest, forgiving Christian that he is, would have been the last to hinder him. But the recollection, as much of her own ill-doing as of his outraged cousin, stands in the way. The words are left unsaid, and for once this notably resourceful man is planless. So he bids the driver drive his best to the grimy hotel. Little more is said by either of them, something commonplace and not to the point. Eustace asks no questions, does not even dare to look at the girl as he helps her out, and has such light articles of baggage as she has brought with her lifted into the verandah. Then he shakes hands, brushes off her thanks, leaps back into the vehicle, and bids his dusky Jehu drive "jut! jildi-si!" (like the Furies) to Watson's hotel. He lifts his hat, and so rolls out of Maude Ashley's life for a space, for little as they both—he, least of all—expect it, he will come again. The last the girl sees he is lifting his hat as the

carriage rolls off, in a cloud of grey Indian dust, and disappears.

Then she turns to be greeted by Mr. Bacchus, who, his heart consumed with Oriental jealousy—product of his Mohammedan descent—at seeing *his* female belongings hobnobbing with another *man*—one, too, of her own superior, hated, *kafir* race—comes out from where he has been watching the scene from behind the absolute secrecy of the fly-screen (or chick) of his own chamber, observant when his presence was least observed or suspected.

Mr. Bacchus has noted the parting and recognised his man.

CHAPTER XI.

AND so Miss Ashley passed another stage onward on her road to ruin, drifting now as helpless as a disabled ship on an ironbound coast—lifeboat gone, anchors dragging—nothing but a miracle can save her now, and alas! the age for miracles is long since past.

Mowlah Bux, B.A., barrister-at-law, practising as a pleader in the various courts of Khurruckpore, was far too wise a man to show the chagrin he felt at seeing the man who had once already so painfully eclipsed him in company with the unfortunate Englishwoman whom he was about to marry, not because he loved her—for love does not enter into such arrangements in the East—but because he hoped to make her the lever to his own notoriety-seeking ends. But he was not even now quite sure of his prey; could not be till the decisive act was accomplished, and the *padre* sahib of this *kafir* church had tied the knot. Besides, Mowlah Bux, B.A., was winning “hands down,” and could afford to be good-humoured for the time, especially as Maude’s appearance had put an end to the anxiety to which he had been a prey ever since he left his home in

Khurruckpore three days before. There all arrangements were completed—as they were completed in Bombay. The parson was to be ready at 1.15 (he had a fashionable wedding at 2 p.m.), the licence was obtained, the witnesses warned to be in readiness—everything was complete. All that was lacking was Maude herself, and now the mail from “home” (as, with a bogus affectation of English thought, the Anglicised native is wont to speak of Old England) had deposited her at Pestonji Byramji’s hotel, and all that was needed was for her to get ready for the ceremony about to take place.

As Maude turned to receive his affectionate greetings, what a sight was disclosed before her eyes. The place was dirty and tumbledown to a degree, the servants hot and unsavoury, the “chicks” dingy and weather-stained, the matting which carpeted the verandah tattered and inches deep in Bombay dust. Even Mowlah Bux, B.A., himself was not quite the same. The trim frockcoat had disappeared, to reappear for the ceremony of the afternoon, and its place was taken by a cool white suit of linen, innocent of collar or shirt cuffs, and buttoning right up to the neck, where it fastened with a hook. And Mowlah Bux’s face was hot and oily, and his likeness to the three or four grinning servants in rear of him was unpleasant to see, and somehow he seemed so very different from the law student of two months ago. But his manner was passable, his English perfect as ever, as he stepped forward to greet her cordially enough.

“Maude, so you have really come. Had you



good voyage? Would you like to have breakfast now, or go to your room? Or perhaps you are tired and will rest till the ceremony, which I have fixed for 1.15?"

"I can't answer all your questions, but where are your mother and your sister? Are they in this hotel?"

"My mother?" He stammered a little and tripped, for though quite ready with the falsehood which was to account for his lady-relatives' non-appearance, he had hardly expected the question so soon. "Oh! my mother is not very well, and the doctor said so long a journey would be too much for her, and my sister has remained to nurse her ill-health. She is very sorry, I am sure."

Concerning which sorrow this tale may have a different tale to tell. But Maude, dismayed at her own utter loneliness, and the indelicacy of her situation, could only think of the present.

"And have you no lady here?" she asked. "How am I to spend the time till the afternoon?"

"With me, I hope," he suggested, aping the gallantry of his late English friends.

"No," she said gravely, "that is impossible on every ground. Don't you see I cannot do that?"

"Oh, no; of course not. I am very stupid," he answered, grinning as if he had made a brilliant discovery, when all the time he understood nothing of what she meant. "See, here is one *ayah* I have brought for you. She is very trustworthy, good woman. *Arri, Ayahji!* come here. The memsahib wants you."

The bamboo screen was lifted as he spoke, and out into the verandah stepped a stout Mussulmani ayah, whom he had engaged the day before in Bombay. As Maude glanced at the new-comer, her heart stood still. The woman was one of the ordinary class, a stout, round-faced, plump Mussulmani, ear-ringed and bangled, but otherwise unadorned, a white sheet over her head, her upper garment black and fashioned not unlike a man's overcoat, and a voluminous white skirt just lifted high enough to show the ends of tight fitting trousers underneath. Cringing and smiling and mock-respectful like all her class, she stepped to the front, raising her hand to her forehead in the ordinary native salute.

"Who is this?" asked Maude.

"Your ayah, nursemaid—what you call her? All English ladies have an ayah in this country. She is very superior woman. I am paying her good wage," answered Mowlah Bux.

"Very well, I will go with her," said the girl resignedly, for she was feeling sick, and was anxious to end this (to her) intensely trying scene.

"And what am I to do?" asked Mowlah Bux, B.A., a little sulkily.

"I cannot tell you. In England we have a superstition that it is unlucky for bride and bridegroom to see each other before the ceremony on their wedding day. We were obliged to meet, but now, good-bye, till one o'clock."

The ayah held up the screen, and saluted again as Miss Ashley walked into her room, leaving the pleader outside to storm and curse the servants to his

heart's content in good, sonorous Hindustani. And, as the screen fell behind her, and she looked with a start at the room inside, not for the first time an uneasy feeling took possession of her that she would have need of all her courage if it was going to be at all like this.

For the furnishings of an Indian hotel bedroom are of a class not calculated to inspire with admiration an Englishwoman fresh from home. In the centre a large flat bedstead without either head or foot rail, on one side a folding-table with the flaps down, on the other a cranky apology for a dressing-table, and scattered about the room an occasional table and three or four cane-seated, hard-backed chairs, the floor covered with an Indian *durri*, faded in colour and by no means overclean, under which was matting first cousin to that in the verandah, but not quite so far gone. Bedding there was none, the Indian custom being that each man takes his own, which, on the whole, is just as well. This was all, except a few bricks placed in a corner on which to stand the trunks when they came, and to keep them more or less sacred from the myriads of insects, black ants, white ants, and sometimes others not perhaps so destructive, but even less desirable, which in their seasons haunt the floor. Out of this room was an opening into another, smaller and even more dilapidated, used as a bathroom. The light in the room was from clerestory windows, well pasted over with blue paper to keep out the glare, and from the doors when open; and the smell of the place was close and musty to the last degree. And this was Maude

Ashley's welcome to the land of her adoption, her husband's home. In all the place the only things she could recognise or approve of were her own neat dressing-case and rugs and bag, placed, for convenience, in the middle of the empty bed. For a moment the girl stood silent and distressed, too distressed to move. Then, turning, she saw the ayah, and asked her to get her a cup of tea.

So far, so good. The tea and something by way of breakfast was promptly brought, for a native servant will always do what he or she is told to do. But here at once Maude felt herself plunged into the differences between the ways of East and West. An English maid under such circumstances would have been sympathetic, interested, helpful. But the ayah was none of these things. When called she came; when not actually wanted, she sat outside in the verandah chatting with the other native servants over this freak of the *vakil sahib* of preferring an English memsahib to one of his own race and creed; and had the girl been able to understand what they were saying, she would have been astonished to find their comments on this untoward proceeding were only less complimentary to him than to herself. And so the morning passed away.

Yes, passed away, in doubts and misgivings and tears, this the last morning of her freedom as an English girl. Now that she was face to face with the last fatal step, something of Eustace's feelings seemed to have entered into her soul. The absence of her own relations, even of her own countrymen, the dirty hotel, the departure of the man who had shown so

kindly an interest in her fate, the fact that she was in a strange land and on the brink of an unknown career, combined to make the girl hesitate, almost wish to draw back. But how? Naturally, appeal to the Colonel. But here, first and foremost, stood in the way the shade of John Strachey, revengeful, and as yet unavenged. The Colonel had never so much as hinted at more than outside help, and what a resource it would be for her to throw herself on the protection of a man under such circumstances as these. If only he had hinted at a warmer interest in her future, it would have been different, but the words which had welled up from his kind heart had remained unspoken by his lips, and she did not like—was afraid, ashamed, if you will have it so—to confess her own defeat. And so the morning passed away in doubts and misgivings for the future, and in tears.

The hot Indian sun mounted higher and higher, the glare became more and more insupportable, and the hum of the busy city hard by was wafted in upon her ears. Was she right or was she wrong? Should she stay or should she escape? These were the questions ringing in her ears. One word of advice or comfort from one of her own race would have turned the scale, but that advice never came, and presently the ayah, by direction of Mowlah Bux, B.A., came in to say that half an hour was all that was left before it would be time to start.

And in due course they started side by side. The witnesses were to meet them at the church (so her future husband said). Somehow Maude felt glad that the hood of her barouche was up, that she could

lean back in her corner unobserved of the many passers-by.

And so the church was reached, and the witnesses pressed forward to meet them—lean Emmanuel de Souza, Portuguese-descended half-caste clerk of the High Court, and Suzanne, his wife, stout and perspiring. It was a relief to her to be told that these two scarecrows were not relations, only friends.

Very nervous were the pair as they advanced up the aisle to where the chaplain awaited them, though nervous for different reasons. Mowlah Bux, B.A., was anxious that even now his prey should not escape him; Maude Ashley was wondering whether even now it was too late. The chaplain glanced curiously at the pair, wondering what it all meant, and why the bride looked so very tired and ill; but he was fully conscious that it was no part of his business to interfere. He had noted her name; but India is a long way from Cambridge, and he had forgotten (if indeed he ever knew) the brilliant senior classic of the last Tripos but one.

Not a pretty ceremony, nor (*pace* our Aryan brother) a proper one, by any means—a ceremony, thank heaven, rare—this criminal foisting of high-class Western civilisation upon the veneered savagery of the East; but not one to linger over by any means. Sufficient only to say the thing was done. And as they finished, as Maude signed away her freedom and turned to leave the church, a fresh trial awaited her. Their wedding was a trifle late, the fashionable marriage to follow was a little eager to be in time, and the two met, actually bride to bride and groom to

groom, in the full glare of a churchful of Bombay officialdom in brilliant uniform, smart toilet, or respectable civilian frock-coat. Met under the very eyes of this big, callous, chattering, pleasure- and excitement-seeking congregation which had assembled to see two of its own people joined in holy wedlock with the approval of society openly expressed. The church had half filled while the first party were signing their names, and when they came out of the vestry the groom in Lancer uniform eyed with astonishment our Mowlah Bux, B.A., while the ladies in smart toilets hushed their buzz of conversation to stare at *her*. Maude had faced many a gathering of her own sex in her college days, faced them undismayed, often triumphant in the hour of some well-deserved success, but she saw no approval now. It was not defiance, but rather open and undisguised disapproval and disgust which was painted on every face, as Mowlah Bux, smirking and pleased, led his shrinking bride (say, rather, white slave, granted him in perpetuity by the law) down the aisle, with lean Emmanuel and his portly Suzanne scuttling along shamefaced in the rear, highly uncomfortable at finding themselves thus running the gauntlet of the eyes of the superior race.

And on the threshold they met the other bride, waiting for them to be clear out of the way before her own triumphal entry in state. And a great throb of agony shot through poor Maude's heart at seeing this living tableau of what ought to have been confronted, ruthlessly and on the instant, with what was.

But Mowlah Bux, B.A., only smirked the harder as he led his prize away.

CHAPTER XII.

So, partly warned, but still to all intents and purposes in absolute ignorance of what she was doing, did Maude Ashley (for by what other name can she be called even when Mowlah Bux's wife?) step downward into the pit. She had been sorry to say good-bye to Eustace as it was; she would have regretted it ten times as much had she known that his was the last friendly European face that she would see for many a long day, his the last honest English hand that it would be given her to grasp. As a matter of fact, the screen or shutter, unpassable, and not to be raised to let her retrace her steps, had shut behind her with a clang, and she was as completely cut off from the old life, as completely launched upon her new career, as it was possible for her to be.

Theory had disregarded practical knowledge, and was about to pay the penalty in sufferings of no common kind. Herself the product of the ultra-civilisation of the age, with the mission in life which had contented her mother and lady ancestors for generations, as it were, cut from under her feet, and no standing ground substituted to do duty in its

stead, she had cast about for a career which would give an outlet for all the stored accomplishments which she had accumulated during a youth of toil. Lacking due experience of the limits of human ability, ignorant of the rubs and crosses of our life which too often bring the cleverest to grief, she had boldly undertaken a task beyond the strength of any human being yet born. Books are fond of telling us that the Aryan peoples of India were highly civilised when our Western forefathers were savages—"naked, and yet not ashamed." But there is something else which the books in question are not always careful to add, viz., that during all the centuries which have elapsed since that time Eastern civilisation has practically stood still, while Western has been advancing by leaps and bounds. To-day the positions are reversed, though in India, at all events, there is an awakening to what is good in the West.

But in one particular most essential to themselves—far more essential to any woman who, like Maude Ashley, lets her zeal outrun her discretion—the movement is so slight as to be hardly noticeable. The men of the East have snatched at our Western learning, are daily improving themselves and their natures, and accumulating a heritage of good of vast importance to generations yet unborn, but in the matter of the greatest blot among their time-dishonoured customs things are absolutely as they were. The women of the East are kept in brutal ignorance and in a servitude as black as the worst that disgraced the now defunct slavery in the West. They are hidden away in their zenanas, forbidden to

appear in public, denied 'education, or amusement, or society, or even the assistance of men doctors in their direst need. We know very little of what goes on in the native household of the better sort (for slave-wives are, like other luxuries, mainly the perquisite of the rich), but what we do know leads us to surmise the worst, and justifies those who wish well to the men of India in thinking that their first real advance in social happiness awaits the day when they shall give their women the treatment which is at present, to their unutterable shame, unknown.

It would be pleasanter far to skip this portion of Maude Ashley's history, and to resume the story later on when there was no longer any doubt that she had failed. But it is necessary to follow her through the process of her disillusionment in the black abyss into which she had been led by her own high-minded longing for a notable career, aided and abetted by the schemes of one Mowlah Bux, B.A., a handsome, dark-skinned native of Upper India, whom she had met first when, in the state of repression, engendered by the surrounding civilisation of the West, but who was only to be properly known and understood when free of his slight veneering of English education, and back in his native town of Khurruckpore.

The thing was done—this binding together under the sanction of church and law of a Christian English-woman and a none too well-born Mohammedan of the East; and the thought that it was done and could not be recalled was the only one present in Maude Ashley's mind as, side by side with her new lord and master, she drove back in that seedy, hired barouche to her

Chattel or Wife?

hotel. As for Emmanuel de Souza and Suzanne, his wife, they departed without further word of mouth (though not without some passing of paper currency between the two men) in a miraculously dingy one-horse buggy (their own property) to their own particular place, and this history is done with them.

And now, on the instant that he was sure of his prey, the pleader, still smirking with delight at his own cleverness, drops some of his veneer and asks the question which he has had ready this four hours past.

"Where did you meet that Eustace fellow, Maude?"

"We travelled together from Aden in the same steamer," she answered.

"D—— him," he growled, leaving off the smirk and rolling his yellow eyes. "What did he want coming here to spoil the pleasure of my wedding day?"

"It was accidental. I had asked him to see me off the ship, as you said that you could not come yourself."

"No, I could not," he answered shortly. "I was not going to expose myself to all the sneers and slights your people show us here in India. It is all very well in London. There public opinion keeps them within bounds; but out here they give themselves such airs and graces as if they, and not we, were the rightful owners of the soil."

"In London you always spoke well of them yourself," she answered.

"That was because it does not always pay to tell the truth," he replied, and then lapsed into silence and the same smirk.

But it was an ill-timed speech so far as Maude was

concerned, since it recalled all her own misgivings of the morning, not to mention the warnings of her friend. If her husband had deceived her in this respect, why not in all the rest? Perhaps, after all, he was the adventurer that Eustace had hinted, and she had sold herself into a bondage worse than death.

"Why could not you speak the truth?" she asked presently. "If I had not trusted you, do you suppose that I should be here now? Why, when you knew my feelings regarding your people, my wish to do for them all that lies in my power, could you not have been open with me? Did you think me so foolish as to be prejudiced by what other people said?"

"I don't know. These military sahi—fellows" (correcting himself as he remembered suburban drawing-rooms) "are awful liars themselves. I'll bet as it is that Eustace told you lots of nasty things about me, did he not?"

"Colonel Eustace knew nothing about you, and I am sure he would not condescend to invent calumnies about any other man."

Her defence of the man he hated roused the slumbering brutality of her husband's nature.

"Well, whether he did or not," he said coarsely, "you'd better think no more about him. You are my wife now, and must behave yourself as such. We are in India now, not in London; and the loose way in which white women, even married women, behave will not be tolerated here, I can tell you."

"I shall choose my own friends as I always have done, and treat them as I like," she answered, her indignation rising fast. But, fortunately, even as she

spoke they turned into the compound of the dingy hotel, and Mowlah Bux recollected that it was still too soon to use the curb, and checked himself.

"Is that your baggage?" he asked. "If it is, we can travel off to-night."

"Yes, it is. Are we to start at once?" she inquired, not a little surprised that he should not have consulted her wishes, as an Englishman would have done.

"Yes. It is expensive living in hotels, and, besides, I have business waiting for me at Khurruckpore. The sooner we are home the better; don't you think so yourself?"

"Oh, certainly," she answered wearily; "anything that you wish. This hotel is so dirty and uncomfortable that I would go anywhere to escape from it."

"Then I will make arrangements for us to go this evening. Let me see—this is Monday. We shall be home on Thursday morning if you feel equal to travelling right through."

"As you wish."

And then, as the carriage stopped, she got out, looked over her belongings to satisfy herself that they were all there, and then went to her own room. Here the ayah found her half an hour afterwards, weeping bitterly. If all we hear is true, tears are no strangers to a native household, and the woman, hard and callous as she was by nature, was touched by her young mistress's grief. She came forward and asked if she could do anything for her.

The voice of human sympathy, quaintly and shyly expressed as it was, caused a fresh breakdown. But presently Maude calmed herself, and let the ayah

bring her water with which to bathe her eyes, and when at last she joined her husband for their early dinner, taken so as to have plenty of time to catch their train, she was more or less herself again.

And so they started and travelled with such speed as an Indian mail train accomplishes—thirty miles an hour at first, and perhaps half as much the last half day or so. But true to what her husband said, she found herself on the platform of the station at Khurruckpore on the Thursday. A nice cool morning, welcome after the stuffy journey, and welcome too was the freedom from the railway carriage, grilled to a fearful temperature by the fiery sun. There were no Europeans about except the stationmaster, who nodded to her husband, and a European soldier, both of whom looked at her with curiosity. When she alighted from the carriage the former came forward to offer his services, which she declined, while her husband quickly bustled forward and told him in what relation they stood.

“Get into the booking-office, Maude—it will be less crowded there—while I get coolies and put the baggage we shall want into a ticckha gharry. The heavy things we will leave here to come up by bullock waggon a little later on.”

And so she went, and, standing inside the doorway, herself unseen, overheard the following conversation between the two Europeans outside:

“See that Englishwoman, Jack?” asked the stationmaster.

“Yes, who is she?”

“The wife of Mowlah Bux, the pleader. At least, he says so.”

"Great Scot! Where on earth did he pick up a fine-looking girl like that?"

"Heaven knows. In England, I suppose. He has been there reading law, and only came back a month since."

"What a sin. Looks quite like a lady, does she not?"

"Yes, but she can't be one. No European lady would do such a thing as marry a greasy, low-class native like him."

"There's no accounting for tastes. Suppose she could not find a man to marry her. Some women will do anything to get a husband, but I don't admire her taste. I only wish that she had given me the chance. Well, good morning, Mr. Martin; my work is over for the next two hours, so I may as well trot back to the lines to get some grub."

He walked close past her, and honoured not her, but what she was supposed to be, with a far from respectful stare. Poor Maude, who was feeling horribly sick and ill, shaken to pieces as she was by the long journey, and its heat and discomfort, and the want of proper food, shrank back into her corner, praying for Mowlah Bux's return. He did not keep her long, but soon was back again, and helped her into that wondrous construction, the ticckha gharry of an up-country station. This time he, as well as she, leaned back—he did not wish to be observed.

And so they drove through the green and well-kept cantonment to the outskirts of the civil lines, and, turning into the compound of a fair-sized bungalow, stopped before the door.

"This is our house," said Mowlah Bux, with, no little pride, as half-a-dozen servants, whom he had by telegram to his babu warned to expect them, came running out to meet their master and mistress.

The veneer was not all off even yet, and, to do him justice, he had done his best to provide his English wife with a suitable home. The house he had taken was one recently vacated by the assistant-commissioner of the place, and was in a good state of repair. In the short time at his disposal he had done as much as it was reasonable to expect. The house had been thoroughly limewashed, the leaks in the roof made good, the garden overhauled, new chicks hung over the verandah, which at that early hour was nice and cool. It was inside that the thing broke down. Here, too, he had tried to do his best; but being forced to take leave himself to Bombay before he could see it done with his own eyes, he had gone to the principal Parsi merchant of the place, and bidden him furnish regardless of expense.

Now, an Indian drawing-room, furnished and decorated by the taste of an Englishwoman, is as pretty a thing as any man need wish to see. But an Englishwoman does not do it all at once, nor does she go to a Parsi for her furniture. She buys a few essentials in the bazaar, and alters and re-upholsters them to suit her taste. The rest she does gradually, trusting to luck to pick up what she requires at sales. But every up-country Parsi has a room full of wonderful furniture, collected during half-a-dozen Anglo-Indian generations as taste has discarded them from use, quaint, crank, old chairs

and sofas, "what-nots," and occasional tables galore, a gorgeous chandelier or two (things never used), great hideous mirrors much begilt but otherwise undecked, brackets with plaster casts and the china ornaments which delighted a bygone age, a still more garish glass, and ancient chromo prints such as Europe never sees, such things being only manufactured for the East.

Even Mowlah Bux, B.A., was startled as he put his shoulder under the chick and surveyed what his friend Edulji had done. To poor Maude, with her splitting headache and her nausea, and the general fatigue and discomfort of two days' travelling in a dusty train, the whole thing seemed like a hideous nightmare, and she turned away silent but broken-hearted at this fresh proof that she had for ever turned her back upon the civilisation of the West. Her husband, who, unaccustomed as he was to English ladies, thought she looked ill and pitied her distress, turned quickly to her.

"Confound that Edulji," he said. "This won't do at all. I told him to put a few things in to make the place habitable till you could see to things yourself. I'll send for him now and have these things removed."

But Maude was far too ill to be comforted.

"Where is my room?" she asked.

"Here," he said. "I chose this because it gets least sun." And, opening a door, he led her into a large, airy apartment, very fairly clean, and furnished well enough, if one or two of the pictures had not obtruded even here.

"Thanks," she said dreamily. "I think I will go to bed."

"You can't do better. I'll just go over to my own

room and get a wash and a change. Here, ayah, come to the memsahib."

The ayah came and helped the sick and weary woman to undress and lie down. Then she got her a cup of tea, and gently fanned her till she dozed off into an uneasy sleep.

An hour later Mowlah Bux, having washed and changed and breakfasted, bethought him of his wife. Changed? Very much so. Presently Maude, waking with a start, found a swarthy native standing looking at her beside the bed, and started up with a cry of horror and dismay.

"How dare you? Where is my husband?" she began.

"Maude, don't you know me?"

The voice broke through the disguise.

"You, is it you? And why are you masquerading in that dress?"

"Masquerading? You forget. Frock-coats are good enough for London. Here I am in Khurruckpore, and must do as my people—here, ayah, ayah, come quickly, the memsahib has fainted."

But Maude refused to be attended to. She was long insensible, and, when she did recover, looked wild, and rambled in her speech, whereat the ayah opined that the memsahib had fever, and suggested his sending for the civil surgeon of the place. But Mowlah Bux could not consent to that. He thought a moment. Then he bade them fetch him Rahim Khan, the native assistant-surgeon. He did not want Europeans prowling round and carrying tales regarding his new home.

CHAPTER XIII.

HUMAN cleverness has a way at times of over-reaching itself, as on this occasion Mowlah Bux discovered to his own chagrin and the very great benefit of his unfortunate wife. His one idea was to keep the private concerns of his ménage on the outskirts of the civil lines a complete secret from the prying eyes of Maude's compatriots. Remember that the man was only after all an ordinary Oriental follower of the Prophet, steeped to the eyes in the prejudices and customs of his race, and very, very indifferently veneered with such civilisation as is to be acquired during a five years' residence in London outside the pale of most respectable society. And a right understanding of how a native of India regards his wife and daughters is a thing not easily to be attained by any European, because one has to marry and live among these peoples as one of themselves to get it. The door of each man's house, of his zenana or women's quarter at least, is rigorously closed to every living male above the age of twelve except himself, even his own sons being turned over to the men as they grow out of mere childhood. Regarding their women as beings without a soul to

be saved (or something very like it), they do not admit them to any share in their social life, and when friend meets friend he does not ask after his wife or daughters as is done elsewhere—to do so would be a breach of good manners—but exhausts his desire to show civility in queries regarding sons and brothers, or, better still, about the selfish creature himself. And the aim and object of their lives is to keep these female slaves most strictly to themselves, denying even a glimpse of them to any other man, lest they should reap the just reward of their own indifference in the possible emancipation from control of those whom they have never tried to attach by feelings of affection to themselves.

These, or something like them, were the feelings of Mowlah Bux in this the first important step of his married life. However Europeanised he might have been in London, there was not the least doubt that, now he was back in his own home and surrounded by his own people, he was like to drift back into his native ways. Though the fact of his young wife being an Englishwoman was strong enough to cause him to admit the ayah's plea of urgency, and call in the native assistant-surgeon in place of some painfully—not to say perilously—ignorant old crone from his native bazaar, still he drew the line at sending for the civil surgeon, the man whom he knew would hate him for this thing that he had done, and who would to a certainty side with his wife against himself. That was what he was perhaps most afraid of. For already, brief as his married life had been—only some sixty hours, mostly spent in the train—Mowlah

Bux was beginning to realise the fact that these Englishwomen were differently constituted from the women of his own race, that even a mere girl like Maude had a strong will and independent notions of her own—things which among his people were only now and again permitted to some grandmother of age and standing, and even then only within the narrow limits of the zenana in which she happened, by right of seniority, to reign supreme.

But clever as Mowlah Bux thought himself, he was about to discover that his cleverness had its limits like that of every one else. Dr. Rahim Khan was a man of one or two distinguishing characteristics, of which our *vakil* was shortly to have experience to his great disgust. Coming hot-foot from his dispensary over the way to answer the summons, the doctor learned for the first time the very unusual step which his young friend had taken, and was inclined to shake his head over it. The doctor was of the best class of native, loyal to the English rule, grateful for what the superior English education had done for him, but still an honest Mussulman to the backbone. Such a man could only disapprove of this marriage on every ground, and, as it happened, he was capable of taking a strong line at need, and of forcing his reluctant co-religionist to do what he himself considered right.

His feelings on entering Mowlah Bux's house were varied. He was first of all anxious to do his healing office, he was sorry for Maude, and very shocked at this unorthodox marriage which had taken place. And Mowlah Bux met him wearing that self-same

smirk, which this time covered not his personal satisfaction, but his anxiety to learn how the doctor was going to take this thing which he had done. For he knew that this stern co-religionist of his was a man of standing, both by virtue of his office and the esteem in which he was held among the sahibs in the community to which they both of right belonged.

"Salaam, doctor sahib," he began, "I have asked you to come to see my wife."

Whereat the doctor pursed up his lips and asked deliberately, "Your wife?"

"Yes, my wife," answered the *vakil*, a trifle defiantly; "an English lady whom I married three days since in Bombay."

"Very good," said Rahim Khan, zeal for his office mastering for the moment all other feelings. "Take me to her."

Perhaps it was just as well that at this juncture poor Maude was too far gone in her fever to recognise any one, or perhaps the reminder that she was now altogether in native hands might have only served to terrify her. But, fortunately for his patient, Rahim Khan was as capable as he was wise. When he had looked at her he shook his head.

"What is it, doctor sahib?" asked Mowlah Bux, speaking low, lest the listening ayah should overhear. "Is it country fever?"

"We will hope so, but it is too early to say for certain," was the unwelcome reply. "The temperature is excessive, and I do not like this delirium. How long has the lady been in the country?"

"Since Monday morning."

"What? Just three days? Why, she must have been travelling all the time!" exclaimed the doctor.

"Nearly. We left Bombay the evening that she arrived."

"And had she been in the country before?"

"Never. She was just imported," replied Mowlah Bux, with some little pride.

"Then let me tell you, jee, that you have done very wrong. Such a journey through such heat, acting on a frame so delicate as these English ladies have, is a very serious thing. You should have rested by day, and only travelled by night. This was quite too much."

"Oh, she is young and strong, and will be all right in a day or two," replied the other confidently.

"That we shall see. Send a servant with me to the hospital and I will send you some medicine, and this afternoon I will call again."

With which cold comfort he went his ways, leaving Mowlah Bux uneasy in his selfish mind, not indeed for his new chattel (Maude, to wit), but for himself and his own comfort. He was angry at this unpromising start in his married life.

But there was worse to come. When Rahim Khan called that evening he shook his head more than ever, and showed no desire to leave the premises.

"Well? Is it country fever?" asked the *vakil*.

"It is still too early to say, but I fear not."

"Then what is it?" asked the other, rather nervously.

"I do not like to say. But tell me, has this poor lady had any shock to her mind of late?"

"None; none whatever that I know of."

The doctor turned upon him fiercely.

"Mowlah Bux," he said, "tell the truth. She has married *you*."

"And why not *me*?"

"Need you ask? You are a well-educated man. She has married in ignorance of our country, and she has been growing more and more sick ever since. She even became senseless, so the ayah tells me, when she saw you in your proper dress."

"She was light-headed before," stammered the *vakil*.

"Perhaps; but the shock, coming on the top of all the hardships to which your inconsiderate cruelty exposed her, has done the mischief. She is English, fresh from her home. This is not a case for me."

"What then?"

"I shall drive to the civil surgeon sahib, and bring him back to see her!"

"You shall do no such thing," cried Mowlah Bux.

"I shall, nor are you the one to stop me. You have done harm enough, Mowlah Bux, as it is. I knew your father, mind you. What would he have said, pious believer that he was, had he lived to see this ending to the education he denied himself to give you? Why have you married this unbeliever, whom you cannot acknowledge among your own people? Does your mother know of this?"

"Ye—es."

"Don't add falsehood to your other faults. You know that she does not."

"Will you tell her?"

"Perhaps she has learned it. Did you think that,

because you have brought this wife to the European quarter, the news of her would not spread to the bazaar? Fie on you, Mowlah Bux, coward, dishonest coward that you are."

"Why should I not marry as I please?"

"Because of the harm that it has done already and is going to do in the future. But we are wasting time. I shall go and fetch the sahib."

"You shall not."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't choose to have such people introduced into my zenana."

"Mowlah Bux, you are a fool. Did you suppose when you married this girl that she was to be treated as one of us? She is an English mensahib, and is sick, as I fear, with that enteric fever with which all these English fall sick when they first come to this country. She must have proper attendance from her own people."

"What? Will you bring the whole world into my house?"

"Yes, if it be necessary. In any case, it is my duty to hand her over to the civil surgeon sahib."

"Rahim Khan, if you will attend to her yourself, with whatever assistance you need, I will make it well worth your while."

"Not I. This matter needs an experience beyond mine, and the English doctor is the proper person to attend to it. I say it, and I mean it too."

He turned to go, but Mowlah Bux tried to hold him back.

"Don't, don't, doctor jee; don't disgrace me in this way."

“Disgrace you? How can I do that more than you yourself have done already? My duty is to report this case, and report it I will.”

And off he drove to fetch his senior, carrying with him a heart sorrowful on every ground. He was sorry for what his friend had done, and sorry too for Maude. In short, from his native standpoint he too disapproved of the thing which had been done quite as much as did Colonel Eustace himself, who, by the by, had seen the announcement in the Bombay paper, and was now travelling up to Simla, and doing his best to forget the woman who had chosen thus to wreck her life in spite of his advice.

CHAPTER XIV

IN England we hear a certain amount about Indian cholera, fever, and liver complaint, but the real white man's enemy in the East is comparatively little talked about. Enteric fever (a form of typhoid) stalks with deadly purpose through barrack-room and bungalow, laying low the young European, and the young soldier in particular, with a deadly regularity which is far more fatal in the long run than the spasmodic efforts of the cholera fiend. It spares neither sex nor any particular age, though it more usually attacks the youngster fresh from Europe, and leaves the high-dried seniors pretty well alone.

A peculiarity of the disease (which was exemplified in Maude Ashley's case) is that it often strikes its victims within an incredibly short time of their landing. As for this poor girl, the worry, the fatigue, the bad food, the knowledge of what she had done, and lastly the shock of her home-coming, had fairly broken her down. When the civil surgeon arrived that evening to see her, he had not the slightest hesitation in confirming the diagnosis of his native colleague—the patient was fast in the clutches of the fell disease.

"She's got it sure enough," said Doctor Collard, as he put up his thermometer, "and that being so it will have to run its course. Now, tell me, who is she, and when did she arrive?"

"Who she is I know not," replied the native doctor, "but she came this morning, I believe, with her husband."

"And where is he?"

"Here," pointing to Mowlah Bux, smirking in the background—smirking harder than ever, in fact, in the effort to conceal his real chagrin.

"What did you say? Her husband?"

"Yes, her husband, Mowlah Bux, *vakil*."

The doctor stared at him aghast.

"Are you indeed the husband of this la—woman?" he asked.

"I am."

"And where are her own friends?"

"She has a mother, but she is in England."

"Good heavens! Well, Mr. *Vakil*, you'll have to get a European nurse."

"And is not native ayah good enough, sahib?"

"No, not in a case like this, unless you want to kill the woman. This is not ordinary country fever, to be all over in a few hours. This, without good nursing, means death."

"I see no reason to bring in European woman here," said Mowlah Bux doggedly.

"Well, *vakilji*, I don't agree with you. This is a matter of urgency, and I must have the poor girl well looked after."

"So she will be. I shall send for my own mother."

"Send for your own fiddlestick. I don't mean any disrespect to your mother, who is doubtless a very worthy woman indeed, but she is not equal to this business. I shall ride across at once to the soldiers' hospital and ask for a European nurse."

"You shall not bring one European nurse here. I forbid it."

"Do you?" retorted Dr. Collard angrily, "even when I tell you that the life of this woman, whom you call your wife——"

"Who is my wife."

"Well, who is your wife—hangs by a thread, depends upon the amount of care and attention that she receives? Do what you like with your own people, but every European is my patient and my care as long as she is sick."

"She is my wife. The law gives you no right to interfere."

"Have a care, Mowlah Bux," cried Rahim Khan. "The sahib is getting angry. Be silent, be silent, brother."

"Yes, be silent," said the doctor, his eyes blazing with wrath. "Do you suppose for one instant that any known law comes between me and my patient, or gives you the right to forbid my doing my best to save her life? Have a care, my friend, or you will find that the law's long arm stretches out in a direction that you don't quite realise. Goodness knows how you ever managed to persuade that poor young girl to marry you; but while I am here, you shall not murder her body as well as her soul, if I can help it. Stand out of my way, and mind that when

my nurse comes, if you presume to interfere or to deny her anything that I order, I'll lodge a complaint straightway with the Commissioner Sahib, and see what he will have to say."

Followed by Rahim Khan, he strode indignantly from the room towards his trap. His colleague's sympathies were all with him and with the sick woman whom they had left inside. As for Mowlah Bux, B.A., he gave it up, not without a sense of soreness all the same. Things were coming to a pretty pass, he thought, when a European doctor dared to walk into his zenana and order him about. He had not quite anticipated this when marrying an English wife. But, nevertheless, he had the sense to give in, knowing that Dr. Collard would be as good as his word, and that a report to the commissioner would not redound to his credit, either with the European community or with his own people.

As Collard jumped into his trap, he bethought him that he would offer Rahim Khan a lift, which the latter accepted with thanks. But it was soon apparent that the doctor had not yet got over his wrath.

"What does it all mean?" he asked. "Is he really married to that girl?"

"So he declares, and so his servants say. She came from England to meet him, and they were married in Bombay."

"Who is he? I don't remember hearing his name."

"He is a pleader."

"Oh, I know he is a *vakil*, but where did he come from here?"

"He has lived here all his life till this last four years, during which he has been in England learning your law."

"Ah, that explains it! He picked up this poor child—she looks little more—at home, and persuaded her to follow him out here. Heaven help her now; nothing else can."

"You are right, sahib. He has done much wrong, as I told him this very day.' She can only bring unhappiness to him, and to all his people."

"And what about herself, Rahim Khan?"

"Oh, she will go with the European gentry, I suppose."

"Then you are very wrong to think so. Unless I am very much mistaken, she will find herself cut off from them as well."

"But why, sahib? We Mussulman folk don't like this thing; indeed, we hate it, we who look to the due order of things, and believe the differences between the two races as still too great to admit of their coming together in one household. But when one of our women has become the wife of a sahib, we have not cast her out by any means."

"No, because—Rahim Khan, I cannot exactly tell you why, but it is so. I only know that poor girl, as ignorant and as innocent of knowing what she is doing as any man or woman could be, has left the old life for ever. We shall never see her again."

"Why not, sahib? It is not generous either to my people or to her."

"Perhaps, but the fact remains. These things do not often happen, thank goodness; but when they do,

"He has lived here all his life till this last four years, during which he has been in England learning your law."

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"Why not, *sahib*? It is not generous either to my people or to her."

"Perhaps, but the fact remains. These things do not often happen, thank goodness; but when they do,

there is no coming back. The men might forgive it (mind, I don't say that they would), but the mem-sahibs, never."

"Then why permit, sahib, such wrong to be done all round?"

"How can we stop it? There are many evil things which we cannot prevent in this world, and our women-folk, as you know, are free as air to pick and choose."

"True; which is foolish, like many other things which your wise people do. But this should be stopped—forbidden by law."

"You don't know us yet, I see, Rahim Khan," replied Collard, with a grim laugh. "Liberty, even when it leads to folly—call it ruin, if you like—such as this, must not be interfered with. Perhaps, if such cases were common, they might be stopped. As it is, one comes now and again and soon blows over. The grave of hope (if not the actual grave of fact) closes over another victim, and there the matter ends. One knows how it happens, but can't for the life of one drive sense into the English head. Look what mistakes they make every day in dealing with India. No one knows it better than yourself."

"True, sahib. Sometimes I think you are all going mad together. In the old days you governed this India well and firmly, keeping the low-caste men in their place, and when you exalted one of us it was because his birth and services entitled him to reward. Now, that is all over. You teach any sweeper's son to read and write and speak your own language, and then, if he be quick to learn, you pat him on the back,

and make him ruler over all of us, to whom, thirty years ago, he dared not speak—dared hardly to lift his eyes to look at us.”

“ You don’t approve of making natives civil servants then, Rahim Khan ? ”

“ Oh, yes, I do, if of the right sort. But these people are not proper people at all. The old native gentlemen and princes of India are being driven into the background for the benefit of these low fellows whose one object is to curry favour with you sahibs, by pretending a liking for you which they do not feel. This will end evilly for you, and for us as well.”

“ I hope not ; but see, there is the hospital. I will ask the apothecary to tell me the best nurse to be got. And just remember one thing. I won’t stand any nonsense. Till that poor girl is able to look after herself again, you and I have got to take care that we are obeyed, and it will be as well for you to make that quite clear to her husband as soon as you like.”

Thus in her greatest need did a higher power raise up friends for poor, stranded Maude. That night found an elderly, but kindly and experienced, soldier’s wife duly established in the sick-room. A masterful old woman, too, who spoke the language as only a soldier’s lady can, and with such emphasis as made every native about the place understand that she was not to be trifled with, among the rest Mowlah Bux, B.A., who began to seriously debate in his own mind whether it would not be advisable to retreat to the more congenial atmosphere of his native bazaar till such time as this trouble might be past and done with.

CHAPTER XV.

THE first thing noticed by Maude Ashley, when returning consciousness permitted her to notice anything at all, was the fact that there was another Englishwoman besides herself in the room. This was so strange a phenomenon that, when her poor tired brain could collect itself a little, she tried to frame her doubts in words.

“Where am I, and who are you?” she asked.

It chanced that just at the moment Mrs. Bainbridge—such was the lady’s name—was standing by the door watching a slight *fracas* between two of the inferior servants which (Mowlah Bux being absent in court) was taking place a good deal nearer the house than he would have permitted had he been at home. But on hearing the voice from the bed (which was placed in the centre of the room) she turned at once, and came to Maude to see what was amiss.

“Where am I?” repeated the sick woman. And as she spoke it dawned upon her nurse that she was sensible, and that the long delirium had come to an end.

“Hush, hush, my dear,” she said, “you must not

talk or excite yourself. You are at home and doing well?"

"But who are you?" repeated Maude.

"The nurse, my dear, who has been looking after you since you were taken ill. You have been ill some time, but will be well soon, please God, if you will only keep quiet and not excite yourself."

"But what is this place?"

"Khurruckpore, worse luck to it," replied the other.

"Then I am in India?"

"Yes, in India sure enough; but unless you keep quiet and try to sleep, I shall go away and send some one who can't understand your questions."

"Please do not do that. I will try to do what you wish, and certainly I feel too weak and ill to do much else."

So Maude, being made comfortable, settled down again to sleep, to awake when the doctor paid his visit in the afternoon.

"We have turned the corner, Mrs. Bainbridge," was Dr. Collard's verdict after he had made his examination. "Sensible, temperature nearly down to normal, nothing needed now but care and proper food to put us all to rights again."

He spoke to the nurse and not to Maude, for somehow his interest in the patient began to slacken from the moment that he saw she was out of danger. When first he saw her she had been a countrywoman in distress, but now he began to remember that she was also Mowlah Bux's wife, a social outcast in virtue of this outrageous thing which she had seen fit to do.

But if he felt inclined to have done with her now

that her actual need of his professional services was at an end, Mrs. Bainbridge, worthy soul, grew hourly closer into the confidence of the girl. She was a stout, ungainly woman of forty, this good soldier's wife, with a weather-beaten face and a mouth sadly disfigured by lack of teeth. Her ordinary costume was a very lank cotton skirt, a cotton dressing-jacket which hung loosely about her ample bust, and (when she had occasion to step out into the garden) a battered pith hat of mushroom shape, once the property of her husband, Lance-Sergeant Bainbridge, now solacing himself for his temporary widowerhood in the sergeants' mess. But her appearance was the worst thing about her. For the rest, she was a kind, motherly woman, daughter of a once well-to-do tradesman, who, after her father's ruin and death, had taken service as a sort of nursery governess with the wife of a captain in the Royal Blanks.

The great mistake of her life had been when she brushed aside the well-meant remonstrances of the captain and her mistress, and insisted upon marrying a good-looking young sergeant in the former's regiment, a step which had been the ruin of her life, though she, good soul, would have been the last to admit it. The marriage had taken place at Malta sixteen years before, and into those sixteen years had been crowded all the vicissitudes known to married life in the ranks. Handsome Jack Bainbridge was a good and kind enough husband in his way, but there was no denying the fact that he was far from steady (as she soon found to her cost), and, as a natural consequence, his career as a soldier was anything but a success.

Derelictions from duty, coupled with an occasional spree, kept the poor man down, and, as if some evil fate pursued him, he spent the whole of his life in climbing laboriously to the respectable rank of sergeant, only to fall with sudden swiftness to the bottom of the ladder again. Kind friends he had in plenty, and no truer friend than Mary herself, and, for her sake, her captain and his wife, the former now risen to the command of the corps. It not infrequently happens in the army that a man's wife is his sheet-anchor. All through the regiment, and in every station where they were quartered, Mary Bainbridge was the stand-by of sick and suffering humanity. She had originally taken to nursing when her own poor baby died, and now, after a long career under a variety of doctors, she was really accomplished at her chosen profession. For a dozen years or more she had nursed the women and children of her regiment, presiding, indeed, invariably when the latter came into the world, and so greatly had her authority waxed and grown that the cry had come to be, "Run for Mrs. Bainbridge," before they thought of notifying the doctor himself.

For the rest she was a good, motherly soul, with many sterling qualities, but, above all, with a heart of gold. She was a capital attendant in the sick room, quiet, firm, obedient and loyal to the doctor's orders, and cheerful all the time, occasionally a trifle too cheerful, being apt to make the patient's head and sides ache with laughing at her reminiscences of the many funny things and people that she had seen. For she had been in half the garrisons in India, and being

gifted with a retentive memory and a quick eye for comicalities, she interlarded her conversation with all sorts of apposite anecdotes and personal illustrations drawn from her ample store. Such a woman, who had known trouble enough in her own married life, and could therefore feel for that of others, was the very best companion poor Maude could have found just then, failing one from her own rank of life. This last was unfortunately impossible, though, happily for her peace of mind, she had not discovered the fact. Moreover, Mary Bainbridge was superior to her station in life, and perhaps, after all, the simple sergeant's wife had about her a truer touch of humanity than the fine madams of the station, who would, as she knew, had they met poor Maude, have drawn in their skirts as from some polluted thing.

So all through the week which followed, Mary Bainbridge was daily more and more winning the confidence of her patient, much to the latter's eventual gain. And things progressed till the first day that she was allowed to sit up on a sofa in readiness for the doctor's usual evening visit.

Returning health, slowly coming back, had begun to take some of the wasted look from Maude's face, and it came about that, when Dr. Collard saw her, it dawned upon him for the first time that she was, or had been, a handsome woman in her time, and the idea annoyed him so that he threw an extra spice of professional stiffness into his manner that afternoon. Now, Maude noted the circumstance, and directly he had taken his leave, she turned to her new, her only, friend to ascertain the cause.

"Dr. Collard has a very peculiar manner for one of his profession," she said.

Mrs. Bainbridge stopped patting the pillows which supported the patient's head.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Well, I have known a good many doctors in England, and, as a rule, they are a most pleasant, genial, talkative set of men. But Dr. Collard has not a word to say for himself. He is so distant, so stiff——"

"Stiff? Bless you, my dear, what will you say next? If you had only been at our last 'gaff' at the theatre in the Artillery Lines and heard him sing 'Gaily the Alderman' on his banjo, you would never say he was stiff again."

"Well, he is always very stiff when he comes here," replied Maude.

"Maybe," and the conversation dropped for a moment.

"Has my husband been here to-day?" was Maude's next question.

"Your husband? Oh, you mean Mowlah Bux? No, he has not. He was here yesterday about this time, when he drove up in a ticckha gharry to ask how you were. He did not get out."

"I think he might have done so."

"Perhaps; but what can you expect from a native?" retorted Mrs. Bainbridge.

"Why 'from a native'? After all, he is a man just as much as your own husband."

"As Bainbridge? No, my dear, he is not. He is a——," but she stopped short.

"Go on," said Maude; "but I may tell you that I am surprised to hear such a speech from you, who have mixed with so many people and seen so much."

"No, my dear, I would rather not go on, for fear my tongue might run away with me. I remember Sergeant Jackson of the regiment marrying a black woman at Lahore; he called her a Eurasian, but, love you, she was the colour of my boot. And I've seen many men in the corps marry half-castes, and even an officer did so once, but he had to go to the Staff Corps for it. That was in Colonel Synge's time, when we lay at Dinapore."

"And did not they get on all right?"

"No, these half-caste women don't wear well. They are just like the natives. They are old when they are five-and-twenty; why, I am sure I don't know, unless it be owing to their having their children too young and too fast. Besides, they are bad-tempered. You know what they say of all half-castes from a mule downwards?—that they have the bad points of both parents and the good of neither. I've always thought that that was unfair to the mule, who is a useful enough beast to carry water in the hills, if only you keep the children away from his heels. But it certainly applies to these Eurasians, as they call themselves nowadays—half-caste was good enough for them when I was a girl."

She stopped, and Maude thought a minute or two before putting her next question.

"Mrs. Bainbridge, have you ever known an English woman who married a native?"

The other hesitated, while her keen eyes looked

pityingly at her questioner. But she was too honest to try to prevaricate.

"No, my dear, I never did," she said.

Again there was a moment's pause, and again it was Maude that spoke.

"And—you seem to have seen so much, and I begin to think that I know so little." (Wonderful proof in itself of how much illness and misfortune had combined to shake the girl's faith in herself.) "Do you see any reason why my marriage should not turn out all right?"

"My dear, good woman, how can it?" was the startling answer.

"Well, my husband is a gentleman——"

("The first of his class then that ever I knew," with an indignant sniff.)

"He has been educated in England, is English in his ideas, and I am sure that, if you knew as much of him as I do, you would confess that he was in every way the equal of any man that you had ever met."

"All humbug, put on to deceive the very green, and as little deceptive as old Mrs. O'Brien's (Colonel O'Brien's wife, who used to command the 163rd at Malta) chestnut wig, which was put on for the sake of appearance and deceived nobody. A native can't become a European any more than the opposite can take place."

Blunt, if true; but, then, good Mrs. Bainbridge was nothing if not frank in her speech. But the effect was notable and swift. The poor girl whom she was addressing, who had learned more of the life into which she had married and of her husband during

that 'three days' railway journey, her home-coming, and his subsequent neglect, than in all those weeks of honeyed talk in her own suburban home, fairly broke down under this confirmation, not only of Colonel Eustace's warnings, but of her own forebodings in the quieter moments of the past week. She burst into a passionate flood of tears.

The effect of her unlucky speech brought Mrs. Bainbridge to her senses on the instant. In a moment she was kneeling beside the poor girl, and had taken her in her motherly arms.

"There, there," she said, as if she were soothing a sick child, "don't take on so; don't, indeed. It's my way. That tongue of mine will, one of these days, be the death of me or of some one else. You must not pay any attention to what is said by a foolish old woman; you must not mind it. Besides, it mayn't come true" (even then she could not find it in her heart to use the stronger word "won't"), "and you must forget all about it."

"Forget it?" sobbed poor Maude. "How can I do that? You yourself were a young woman once—a bride (it seems a mockery to use the word), but had you such an awakening as this? To find that your own people had deserted you, that your husband cared so little what became of you that he went to live elsewhere, and could hardly find time to put his head out of a carriage to ask whether——"

"Now, now, you must not think that. He is in an unlucky position. You see, he has been turned out of the house."

"How so? Who could do that?"

"Well, to start with, he did not want to call in Dr. Collard at all."

"What? Would he have let me die?"

"No, but he wanted to keep you in the hands of the native doctor, Rahim Khan, a very worthy man too. But Rahim Khan said 'no.' You were English, and Dr. Collard must look after you. Then they fetched me, whereupon Mowlah Bux said he was not going to stay, but would——"

"Not going to stay? What did he mean?"

"Well, you see, these people don't allow men, not even doctors, in their house. They would rather their women died than were seen."

"I know that. My husband has often talked to me in London of their sufferings, and of how much needed to be done."

"What did I tell you? The moment he leaves England and gets among his own people again he forgets all that, and becomes himself — bigoted, narrow, prejudiced again."

"Oh, heaven help me! Mrs. Bainbridge, what shall I do? What have I done?"

"My poor child, no woman or man ought to come between wedded folks. But I can't believe that you are really married; I can't indeed."

"I am, there is no doubt of that."

"How came you to do it? Did no one warn you what you were doing?"

"Not till it was too late."

"Then, some one did. If only you had listened to her."

"It was not a woman. It was Colonel Eustace, with whom I travelled from Aden to Bombay."

“What? Little Eustace, Frank Eustace—the lucky boy, as I always used to call him. Well do I remember his joining his regiment when we lay at Lucknow. He was in the Verderers then, and I suppose he belongs to them now. A nice lad he was too, always in some scrape or other, and always getting out of it again. I bound up his wrist for him once when he had sprained it falling over a jump. He never forgets me. I saw him only last year when the Chief was going round the married quarters at Naini Tal, where I was in the hills. A nice humbug that is too, the quarter-master coming round the day before to tell you all to clean up, and to give your front rooms a smartening up, just like they give the barrack-rooms before an inspection. And then the Chief himself putting his head in at the door of every room, and asking you why you were sent up and how the baby is (it does not matter the least if you have not got one—he takes the chance of that), and if you say there is a broken chair he looks at the poor old quarter-master as if he would like to eat him, and tells one of the other Generals to be sure and make a note of it. My dear, there is a lot of humbug in these things, more than you might think. However, I was forgetting the Colonel. I saw him at once, and wondered if he’d remember me. Bless you, as soon as the Chief was passed, in he steps and sits down to chat over old times for a quarter of an hour, till we heard them coming back by the back way, and I let him out through the bath-room, and he rejoined them without ever being missed.”

This sort of prattle was the best thing under the circumstances to help poor Maude to recover herself.

"Fancy your knowing Colonel Eustace," she said.

"Know the lucky boy?" replied the other, glad to find her getting calmer, "everybody in India knows him, and a good many envy him as well. Everything he touches turns to gold. Not that he wants that, for I remember hearing that he was heir to a good estate. But now you are better, my dear, I want to ask you not to mind my running away for an hour or so. I had a note from barracks which told me that I had better step up and let Bainbridge know I would not stand it."

"I hope nothing is wrong?"

"Nothing unusual, only Bainbridge has been going on with his little games. He usually does when I am away. But that is nothing; only it would be a pity if he got into trouble when he stood second for sergeant, and the Colonel had promised him the next step."

"You good soul, and all this time we have been talking of my troubles, you had your own."

"Don't think of that. But I had better get away, I think."

"Will you be long?"

"An hour or so, not much more. It's only a step to the lines. I sent for a gharry, and here it comes."

"You are sure you will come back?" asked Maude anxiously.

"No fear of that," replied the good woman, with a laugh. "I shan't desert you till you send me away."

CHAPTER XVI.

It so chanced that upon this occasion, for reasons which do not concern our history in the least, the exhortation, or bringing to a better frame of mind, of John Bainbridge took considerably longer than the time which his wife had expected. It is to be feared that the erring and unstable sergeant had wandered unusually far from the course of strict straight-walking, and that the admonitions of Mary, his wife, were unusually stringent and prolonged. Any way, the hour for which she had asked permission to absent herself from the sick-room had lengthened out to nearly two, and her patient still sat silent and solitary awaiting her return. It was not, perhaps, the best thing imaginable for poor sick Maude to be left alone for so long to feed upon her own gloomy thoughts, for the ayah who was nominally in charge of her was, as a matter of fact, squatted round the corner in the verandah, enjoying, after the way of her countrywomen, a highly refreshing smoke. At best she was no companion for the Cambridge lady-graduate, less than ever now in the moment of Maude's awakening to the stern realities of her ruin.

Perhaps it was better that the girl should be left to herself—silent, solitary, and depressed—to contemplate the prospect which lay before her, now when it was too late to escape.

And what a prospect it was—work of her own hands, too, wrought painfully, masterfully, at the cost of a mother's tears and a lover's wounded heart—the utter ruin of herself. A short three months ago we saw her with everything that makes life worth living opening out before her—her life expanding and beautifying itself like some lovely flower. To-day she lay here, battered and broken and wearied, her beauty and her fragrance gone, a thing the world had done with and meant to cast away. She saw it now, understood all that Eustace had meant when he besought her, whatever she eventually did, to pause and gain a little experience of the country before she took the irrevocable step. Her marriage had been impossible, and he had known it, and had tried to make her know it too; but in her pride and self-confidence she had brushed his wise advice away. And yet if—and the poor, bruised heart grew sadder still—one kind word of self, one faint suggestion that he took more than a general interest in her fate, had been spoken on that hot morning in Bombay, it might, it would, have saved her from this pit into which she had fallen.

Could a more dread or awful fate overtake any young, successful, and ambitious soul? When first we saw her she was full of her life and her achievements, confident, proud of her abilities, and thirsting for a great career. But, alas! she had lacked the one thing indispensable—discretion—which tames the proud and

makes them turn to the older and more experienced of their species for advice. And on this rock she had split and ruined her career. Well had it been for her had she been content, after all, to go down with honest John Strachey into his east-end parish to throw all her great energies and proved ability into the noble task of seconding the efforts of that faithful servant of his God. If, on the face of this globe, there is one duty which more than any other appeals to English men and women for such aid, direct or indirect, such money or personal service as they are qualified to give, it is the task of bettering the minds, brightening the lives, and casting a ray of sadly absent light into our English too-neglected savage countries. But with your good Christian of the annual-mission-sermon sort, the one thing never to be remembered is that charity begins at home. It almost seems as if Satan, who can find as happy hunting grounds within the seas which gird our native isle as anywhere, had raised up a false god for such to worship, lest they should one day awake to facts, and, throwing over half the futile efforts made in distant continents to convert people only to be Christianised by the march of time, should pour their gold into the dens and rookeries where, but a stone's throw from Croesus' palace, vice and misery reign supreme. Preach to the heathen if need be, but let the heathen near home have the first claim yet awhile, for they need it quite as much as any in the world.

This was the grand mistake which Maude herself had made. She had allowed her feelings to be worked upon by the honeyed words of that well-veneered

pleader, Mowlah Bux. She did not understand (poor girl, how could she?) that the hope for India's future lies not in the swallowing by a few ambitious men of not much account of great lumps of European civilisation which they can never hope to digest, but in the gradual grafting of all that is good in the West into the noble trunk of the old-time greatness of the East. She could not guess that Mr. Bacchus of the Middle Temple, barrister-at-law, in his neat frock-coat, with his perfect English, quiet manners, and not outwardly different from the rest of his fellows save in his olive complexion and his coal-black, lustreless hair, could in a short two months sink back into Mowlah Bux, the old *kabari's* son of Khurruckpore bazaar, as deeply steeped in all the evil prejudices and practices of his narrow creed as any man between Peshawur and Ceylon. She could not believe that he, with perfect English, perfect manners, perfect ideals (well crammed out of the better class of English books), could be at bottom only a greedy, sensual, narrow-minded bigot, to whom she herself was but a chattel to be used, broken if need be, and then thrown away.

But there was little doubt about it now—doubt in her own mind next to none. And now, after a few weeks or less in India, all save a few days spent in a sick-bed, she had learned more than she could have hoped to learn from years of reading or from hours of verbal remonstrance. She remembered with shame how, believing all others, and especially this earnest young Indian, to be as honest and as enthusiastic as herself, she had listened and listened, and had drunk in his noble, burning words as he spoke of the loveless

lives of the women of his native land, and of how they lacked amusement, education, occupation, even kindness itself, at their master's hands. And he had enlarged upon the work to be done by some fair apostle of a better state of things, who, with the cruel *purdah*—the curtain which shuts off all female India from knowledge of the world—powerless to stop her communicating with her own sex, should spread this new gospel of useful happiness among her benighted sisters in the distant East. And such is the power of fine notions that the man had grown quite eloquent (a quality seldom lacking to his race) and enthusiastic as he drew this glorious picture. So that, perhaps, in all the glow of his Western newly acquired civilisation, he had actually come to believe in the possibility of such a Utopia himself. Any way, he had infected her, filled her with a noble ambition that this might prove the task she hungered for for herself. And it was this which, as the glib Oriental put forth his ideas, left her (in her turn self-exalted) as pliable as wax in his hands. John Strachey, poor, honest man, with his commonplace career, might fitly mate with one of lesser ability, cast in a lesser mould. Let it be her task to carry light through Eastern darkness, a task well worthy to be the calling of her life.

A noble idea in truth. And let us hope that one day it may be accomplished, and by one of us; but all the same, a task utterly beyond the strength of Mowlah Bux's wife. For the pleader was not even, in spite of his English education, a good specimen of the men of his race, even the best of whom view their womenkind in a light which cannot be written down

in decent words. He might, when in London for a space, be exalted by fine notions, just as a plant in a forcing-house may be driven to sprout in a way which nature never intended. But it was inevitable that his good intentions should wither under his native Eastern sun, that his bogus Western civilisation should slip off as he changed his London-made clothes.

And now, alas! Maude knew it, and felt it to be hopeless for her ever to look for a better or a brighter state of things. This man, steeped as he was in Eastern vices and superstitions, was no fit companion for her life. And if all they told her was true, she was likely to be cast aside by her own countrymen and women as well, though she still hoped that the last, at all events, would be able to enter into her ambitions and to read her motives aright. And there was one last, lingering hope, inexpressibly precious just then, though in reality but another proof that even now she had not mastered the situation in the least. Her marriage might have been a huge mistake, her countrymen and their wives might look askance at her, but there remained her career as a missionary among her unhappy sisters of many an Indian household—of that nothing could rob her while she had the energy to work.

The sun came slanting lovingly across the garden (heavily scented, but sadly lacking in either flowers or turf) right up to the door close to which she sat. And in the dreamy sense of bodily comfort, product of convalescence, and of her return from the shadow of death, her mind grew gradually calmer with the

comfort of this thought. If the European residents chose to reject her, she could still fall back upon those whom she had come to the country to serve. As soon as she was able she would seek out Mowlah Bux's mother and sisters, and win their love. He had often spoken of them, and told her how very superior to the ruck they were. Indeed (as he had truthfully declared), it was the constant promptings of his mother which had induced his father to devote him to this career which he was following even then, above all who had sent him to drink of the fountain of learning in the West. These would be the women who would teach her all that she required to know in order to gain the entrée to the wretched houses of which her husband had told her. If (and woman-like she hoped against hope that it might not be the case) her married life was wrecked, she still had her career, and in this, in the hour of her despair, she found the consolation which she so sorely lacked.

The sun was shining pleasantly in under the verandah, sending long slanting rays of light across her vision, not into her eyes. The evening was fairly cool, the silence almost painful, as it usually is in an Indian cantonment, where the traffic is practically nil, and the deadly stillness was unbroken save by the distant hum of teeming humanity in the bazaar, distant, perhaps, half a mile. Then, as she listened, waiting for the first sound which should herald Mary Bainbridge's return, there came down the hard level road (the Indian road is one of the very best things that they do) the jangling of bells attached to some animal, the regular sound of whose

footfall was distinguishable from the rattle of the wheels of the vehicle to which he was attached. Idly interested, for, knowing no one except the nurse, Mande could hardly be expected to wonder who it was, she sat there listening till to her surprise the trap turned into the garden, and jingled along the drive up to the front of the house, finally stopping right opposite to where she herself sat. And then, as she looked more closely, surprise succeeded to curiosity. For the noisy quadruped was a small white pony with shaggy mane and tail, his coat unkempt and rusty, nay, liberally stained with *hennah* to a lively orange, like the beard of some pious Mussulman owner who had made the sacred pilgrimage to Mecca. His head was plentifully decorated with cowrie shells sewn on cloth, from which also depended the bells. For reins he had a rope, for harness a small saddle to which was attached at the top a chain connected with the bamboo shafts of the conveyance (these last, while nearly meeting behind the body of the vehicle, splayed to a considerable width in front of the pony's nose), which were prevented from flying upwards by a broad band of leather passed under the belly of the steed. As for the trap itself, it ran on two erratic wheels, between which hung a net to carry fodder or anything of like nature. Its body consisted of a small square platform only fairly horizontal, from each corner of which rose uprights supporting a canopy of red cloth, the sides being enclosed with curtains of the same material, ventilation being secured by spy holes, through which the

occupant could survey the world, himself unseen. On the front of the platform, with his feet resting on one shaft, sat the driver, a dirty brown man, his matted hair and greasy turban inextricably mixed, the rest of his clothing a gaily embroidered waiscoat of uncertain age, and sundry miscellaneous wrappings (a *dhoti*, to wit) round his loins. Slippers, too, he wore, being a prudent man who recognised that sudden dissolution always threatened the crazy conveyance, and that he might have to walk.

Having checked the pony by a jerk of the rope, and then, with vehement denunciations of his female relatives to remote generations, bidden him stand still (a thing the poor broken-winded beast was by no means reluctant to do), this worthy blew his nose, as we may suppose Adam used to do, and then, having expectorated, rubbed his head and waited on events.

Next, Maude, who was idly amused, saw a trouser leg thrust shyly forth from under the curtain, and followed in due course by a strange figure, which, when it stood up, reminded her of nothing quite so much as the turnip and sheet bogies of her childhood. For nothing was visible except a long sort of over-wrap or extinguisher of white linen, fitting the crown of the head, and reaching to the ground, unbroken save by two tiny latticed holes for eyes and one for mouth. A moment the figure, which seemed to Maude to be too small for a man and too broad for a boy, hesitated, then it set foot on the carpeted verandah and simultaneously kicked off its shoes and deposited them on the edge of the carpet. A couple

of hurried sentences were exchanged with the ayah (still busy smoking), and then the chick was lifted, and the apparition stepped inside alone.

The instant the bamboo screen fell behind it, it threw off the *burkah* (or veil), as they call the outer garment, and revealed to Maude's astonished eyes a little, shrivelled, white-haired, bandy-legged old woman, apparently of considerable age, with bleared eyes, and lips and teeth stained a lively red from some substance which she was chewing mercilessly all the time (it was betel, in fact), the juice of which at times ran out of the corners of her mouth. The backs of her hands were brown like her face had once been, the palms horny and (where they were not white like a monkey's) stained bright orange like the pony's legs and face. The costume she wore was simple. A white bodice and white linen sheet thrown over her grey hair (neither of these last overclean), trousers of red linen striped with yellow, worn skintight below the knee and very loose above, silver bangles on her wrists and ankles with little jingling bells attached, and on her fingers and toes sundry silver rings. The feet, which were otherwise bare, were white and horny below, brown and skinny above, and covered in the exposed part with a very noticeable coat of Indian dust.

For a moment the pair stood eyeing each other, the fair young English girl and the shrivelled Indian crone, the first astonished at the intrusion, the last coolly, but it seemed malignantly, blinking her bleared old eyes. Then Maude recovered her wits.

"Ayah!"

“Yes, memsahib.”

“Who is this person, and what does she want?”

“She is very old woman, that come to see the memsahib. I never yet see her once this time before, but she telling me she that Mowlah Bux’s mama!”

CHAPTER XVII.

"Jee hah. Tikk hai. Ham Mowlah Bux's ki mah!"
Which (with apologies for introducing Hindustani, inevitable here, but to be avoided elsewhere in the course of this story) may be freely translated—"She is quite right. I am Mowlah Bux's mama."

Then for a moment silence fell on all three, while Maude lay back in her chair quite unable to realise anything except the horrible fact that this shrivelled old hag must indeed be that mother-in-law of whom she had but that instant been drawing such a flattering picture in her own mind. As for her visitor, she stood leering at her new relation, with her face puckered up into a very unpleasant look indeed, and quietly chewing the betel nut in her mouth. Each was taking stock of the other, while the ayah stood by.

Presently Maude found her tongue again.

"Ayah, can this be true? Is this really my husband's mother?"

"So she say, but I never see her before this time," was once again the answer.

And so, thought Maude, this was the highly

cultivated native lady to whom she had been a few minutes before looking for assistance in her scheme of a career; this dirty, dusty old woman, more like the traditional witch than the educated companion she was so longing to find. Here, indeed, was the grave of the last of her ambitions and of her hopes.

"Does she speak English?" she asked, with an effort.

Apparently not one word, at least the question provoked no answer but a headshake of angry emphasis. And so throughout the conversation which followed, the ayah had to be the means of communicating to each in turn the sentiments of this badly assorted pair.

"Ask her to sit down; give her a chair."

Horror of horrors! She waved away the chair and squatted, native fashion, on her heels, and so, never taking her eyes off the woman, who according to her notions had bewitched her son, she waited on events. Perhaps she had not many English ladies on her visiting list, and was a trifle awed by the presence of one of the hated race. But none the less she was watchfully resentful, highly indignant alike with her son and the woman who had enticed him so far astray from the marriage customs of his own land.

"Why did she come here?" asked Maude.

"She say she want to see the memsahib."

"And can I do anything for her?" A lame question perhaps, but only natural. What affection could she conjure up for this grim monkey? What aid could her powers of small talk yield at such a time? This in itself was proof positive how little there was

in common between the pair. Her question, however, had the effect of stirring the old woman into malignant activity. So far a sort of shyness had held her captive, but now she suddenly became her natural self again. Wheeling swiftly round on her heels towards the ayah, she commenced a very torrent of words, supporting her points by more emphatic gestures than are usual in well-bred society. And, though not a word she said conveyed the smallest meaning to her English listener's ear, there was no mistaking her earnestness. Now in high-pitched tones, now sinking her voice, now pleading, now pouring out unmistakable imprecations, she alternately stormed and coaxed at the ayah, who, for her part, stolid and phlegmatic after the manner of her class when not personally concerned in the woes recited, threw in an occasional word of sympathy, or more often a grunt. Presently the flow of invective ceased, and the interpreter turned to her mistress to explain.

"She say that Mowlah Bux very bad man indeed. He making marrying the memsahib, not telling his mother nor his aunts nor any one. She hear it all through one old woman first of all, how Mowlah Bux bringing one English memsahib with him come living in the bungalow. And then she saying, 'What for you bring this woman making disgrace that family of mine?' Her son make plenty of bobberee, calling her *pagil* goddam, and many bad words, saying, 'That my wife.' So she come see the memsahib."

"Tell her I am sorry he did not tell her as he ought to have done."

But apparently the answer failed in any way to conciliate the fury, who swung round again and faced her victim vindictively.

"She asking what for you making spoil this Mowlah Bux?"

"Spoil him? What does she mean?"

"She say he honourable family, but every one turn their backs on that Mowlah Bux now he disgrace himself marrying you."

Blessed art of interpretation in unskilful hands! It was true every word of it, and just what the spiteful old woman meant to convey. But what a remark for poor Maude to hear! Already she knew that her own people meant to reject her. Would it be so with his as well?

"Tell her to go away," she said faintly. "Say I have been ill and am not at all strong. I really cannot talk to her now, my head seems to swim."

But this was the very last thing that the old beldame had come for. Elderly ladies of her nation, accustomed to lord it over the younger members of their household, have strong ideas of their own importance, and are not going to take orders from, so-to-speak, the last-joined recruit. It was as well for Maude that she could not understand the answer, which, indeed, the ayah did not see fit to repeat. But there was no doubt that the old lady was wrathful beyond words. Indeed, after more of the vehement gesticulation, accompanied by the torrent of abuse addressed vicariously to the ayah, she tired of that amusement, and, rising to her feet, directed a tirade (of which, of course, no sound conveyed the

least meaning to the person addressed) at Maude herself. She was for all the world like an angry cat—spitting and swearing and arching her back in turn, and so she might have continued till the crack of doom, or until her victim broke down, had not the door been flung open and Mowlah Bux himself, dressed in his European clothes, walked into the room.

Clearly the *rencontre* was unexpected on his part, at all events, for, as he saw his mother, he looked confused, and fell back a step. What followed, except its intense vituperativeness, was, of course, all Hebrew to Maude, though she afterwards learned from the ayah that what had passed was this—The *vakil* was beginning to think that he ought to show rather more attention to his poor young wife. Full of these good intentions, he had ascertained from Rahim Khan that she was better—well enough, in fact, to be able to bear the honour of the visit he proposed to pay. So he had hastened to the bungalow, changed into his London clothes so as to avoid shocking the invalid, and was actually entering the room before he discovered his mother was there, in place of in her proper place in the bazaar.

“You here?” he exclaimed rather guiltily.

“Yes, son of an evil mother,” replied the old dame, quite forgetting that she was speaking of herself. “I have come to see this creature and this fine house which, imitating the Englishry and disdaining the customs of your fathers, you have got together, while we starve and grieve, for all you care, oh pig.”

“Be silent, woman. How dare you to come here without my bidding you? This is no place for you.”

"You are right. But I am not to be spurned like this. Take that—and that—and that——"

With which the beldame, not to be put off so easily, threw herself, claws and all, upon her son, tearing and scratching at his face and clothes, and administering sundry blows as well, ceasing the while from words, but not from angry, inarticulate yells, which were horrible to hear.

For a minute or so her son stood the attack. Then, recollecting himself, he shook her off, and with a vigorous push sent her across the room. This was bad enough, and caused Maude to veil her eyes, but worse was to follow. Then and there, in his faultless frock-coat which he had worn at his wedding a few weeks before, with his tie and collar, now somewhat, it is true, awry, before his wife's very eyes, he threw off the man and became the cowardly, semi-savage creature that he really was. He flew after his mother, meaning to inflict such a lesson as should teach her not to interfere with him again, but before he could carry out his intention his arm was caught by some one as strong as he, and his career checked.

"You miserable little creature, would you raise your hand against a woman?" exclaimed Mary Bainbridge, just returned from admonishing a better man than him. "Try it again and I will teach you a lesson you need. And you, old woman, the sooner you get into that ekkha again and back to your bazaar the better. This lady is ill, and not to be disturbed like this."

Snorting, fuming, still swearing (the lady especially), the combatants obeyed superior force, and departed each to their own place. A minute later the ekkha jingled out of the compound, bearing its fair burden

homewards, while Mowlah Bux, too, disappeared. The unexpected encounter had spoiled his appetite for peacemaking, and he resumed his native dress, and, in his turn, took himself off in the direction of the bazaar.

As the storm rolled away from the house, Mary Bainbridge turned to her patient, on whom the scene had had a most disastrous effect.

"What shall I do, what shall I do?" was Maude's moaning cry.

"Hush, hush, my dear, don't think of it. Why, bless me" (mindful of her own experiences with John Bainbridge that very afternoon), "these things are common, as you may be certain, in every family."

"Common? How can you say so? Don't you know that, if you had not stopped him when you did, that man would have struck his own mother?"

"His mother? Well, I never! So that was his mother? A nice family!"

"You forget that I have made it my family," sobbed poor Maude.

"I did, my dear, I did indeed. Well, the sooner that you are clear of them the better. You can't stop here."

"What can I do?"

"I am sure I don't know. But I have a bit of news for you to-night. A friend of yours is coming here."

"Who?"

"The lucky boy. Bainbridge tells me that he is to be the new Adjutant-General here. There, there, don't look so scared. You're overtired, and must go to bed again."

CHAPTER XVIII.

IF any proof were needed of how friendless Maude had come to feel herself in this strange land, it was furnished by the ridiculous state of excitement into which she was thrown by the news that Colonel Eustace was coming to Khurruckpore. Half that night she lay awake listening to her good nurse snoring, and thinking and scheming how she could at once put herself in communication with her one reliable friend as a preliminary to escaping from a position which had become untenable.

For, on this point, her mind was made up—she meant to escape and to make Eustace her assistant in doing so. That afternoon's work had completed her disillusionment, and as the growing generation are nothing if not headstrong, just as she had walked into the trap, defiant and regardless of advice, so she meant to walk out of it, while there was yet time, defiant and regardless of the conventionalities. The temporary glamour thrown over Mowlah Bux, and the career which a union with him had appeared to open up, was dissipated, and she was determined, at any cost to herself, to destroy this ill-assorted match,

which had been so ineffectual, and to return to her own people just as he seemed inclined to return to his.

A wise resolution, if only she could contrive to carry it into effect. She knew that she had ruined her life by legally binding herself to a half-savage, but it was too late now to hope to remedy that. The return of her health should be the signal for her emancipation; the first act of her recovered bodily strength should be to cast off this tie which had become so hateful. The whole thing was patent now, fixed in her memory by the scene of that very afternoon. The man had been a deception throughout; every word he had said about himself, his views—worst of all, about his relations—had been a deliberate lie. For the present she would keep her intentions to herself, retaining Mary Bainbridge with her as a protection, but the instant it was possible she would claim the protection of her countrymen as a preliminary to carrying her sadly disillusioned self back to her English home.

The prospect of release made her terribly impatient. But when, on the following morning, she questioned her nurse regarding when it was likely that Colonel Eustace would arrive, the answer was disappointing.

Mrs. Bainbridge did not know for certain; she believed it would be some day soon. She would make inquiries and let her patient know.

But that morning brought Maude a fresh trial. Scarcely had she finished breakfast before her husband, looking rather heavy about the eyes, entered the room.

"Good morning, Maude," he said, shifty and smirking as ever, "I want a talk with you."

He glanced at the nurse, who, for her part, was watching him with no friendly glance, and then he added—

“What I have to say to you is best said in private.”

“All right,” said Mary Bainbridge, with a snort, “I can go for a stroll in the garden if you want to be alone with her. But mind, no scenes. She is not strong enough to be excited or bullied, and I warn you I shall be within hail if she calls.”

With which she caught up the battered pith hat and withdrew.

“Well, what is it?” asked Maude, finding that he hesitated to begin.

“I came to say that I am sorry for what happened yesterday,” he said.

“Words can hardly mend it,” she said coldly. “I was prepared to find India different from my own country, but I never expected to see a son—you, above all others—strike his mother before my eyes.”

“She deserved it,” he replied, grinding his teeth, not in righteous indignation at his own outbreak, but at the recollection of the old woman’s unbidden intrusion. “I told her not to come, and yet she came, so I had to beat her and turn her out. It was her due.”

“Then what are you sorry for?”

“That she annoyed you by coming. It was not my fault.”

“Why should she not come?”

“Because she is no proper associate for an English lady like you.”

"And in England you said she was the best and noblest of women!"

"That was in England," was all he answered.

"And I, too, am beginning to find out that much which you told me in England was—well—not true," she exclaimed indignantly. "You have deceived me bitterly and cruelly in every word you said."

"And you? Have you not deceived me too? You came here willing and anxious to be my wife. We have not been married many weeks, but it has all been a trouble to me. First you sulk, then you fall sick, then you disgrace my house——"

"How?"

"By showing yourself to men, and bringing low people here."

"Did you want me to die?"

"No."

"Then what did you want?"

"A wife who would respect the customs of her husband's country, who would behave herself as a native gentleman's wife should. Why, I have even been turned into a corner of my own house, while you and your friends use it as if it were yours and not mine at all. The very servants laugh at my shame."

"I am sorry if you have been inconvenienced," she answered, "but I could not help falling sick. Indeed, both the doctor and the nurse say it was your own fault for bringing me so long a journey as you did."

"Of course they take your part, but I warn you that I am not going to submit to this much longer. You must obey me, and do what I wish."

"And what is that, pray?"

"You are my wife, and shall behave as such. You must go among my people and live as they do. I made a great mistake in ever bringing you to this bungalow. As soon as you can move, you shall go to my proper home."

"And where is that?"

"In the native city."

"What do you want to do—to cut me off more completely from my own people than you have done already?"

"There is little fear of that," he answered, with a sneering laugh. "Your proud English people are too proud to have much to say to a native gentleman's wife. Not one of them would speak to you now."

"Because of my marrying you," she answered indignantly. "And yet you are wicked enough to throw it in my teeth. But though you have cut me off from my own people, as you think——"

"There is no thinking about it. It is a fact."

"Well—as you hope, you will find you are wrong. I decline altogether to move from a house in the European quarter, or to associate with people such as" (she caught herself just in time) "I can imagine."

"You will have to live and to associate with my people."

"I shall do nothing of the sort."

The man came closer to her, the smirk gone out of his face, and in its place a very evil leer.

"Take care, woman," he said, through his set teeth; "you will find that a husband has rights under the law; you shall, indeed. I will not stand any of your

haughty English-lady ideas. You are my wife, and shall obey me."

"Only so far as my conscience will let me."

"Your conscience let you marry me," he hissed, "and you will find that now it is too late to change, You are very proud yourself, and very clever, but you are not clever enough to outwit *me*."

"That remains to be proved."

"Would you rebel?"

"Never mind what I would do. But I tell you this, that if ever I doubted before that you were unfit to be my husband, I do not now."

"What? You defy me?" he exclaimed, drawing closer to her and raising his hand as if to strike her. "I will teach you how we of this country——"

"Come a step nearer and I will call for help."

"Be quiet, woman, you would disgrace me more than ever."

"I cannot disgrace you more than you disgrace yourself," she cried. "O God! is it indeed true that I am tied to such a man as this?"

"It is," he said, turning to go, "and the sooner you make up your mind to the fact the better. At present you escape, but not altogether, as you have yet to learn."

He passed into the garden, where he told Mrs. Bainbridge to go to her patient, who needed her, he thought.

"She is still far from well, I think," he said, "she gets so easily excited."

But his manner did not deceive his enemy.

"She has enough to do that for her," she said, as she brushed past him.

Poor Maude was trembling like a leaf—far too weak as yet to be treated in such a fashion.

“What is the matter?” asked the nurse, taking her in her arms and trying to soothe her. “What has he been saying to you now?”

“That I am now to all intents and purposes a native woman—like that hideous mother of his, and that I must live like her in a native house.”

“My dear, you could not; it would kill you in a week.”

“He says, too, that all the English people will abandon me now that I am his wife.”

“More shame to them if they did,” said the other, less decidedly. “We will hope it won’t quite come to that.”

“Why has not a single one of them come near me?”

“You’ve been ill, remember.”

“Yes, but that is all the more reason. Is there no clergyman or his wife?”

“The chaplain’s wife. Bless you, they are not like the parson’s wife at home. They do no visiting to speak of, even among the soldiers’ wives.”

“But ought not somebody, knowing me to be a stranger, and nearly dead, to have come to ask how I was?”

“My dear, I can’t explain it.”

“Say rather you won’t, because you are afraid to tell the truth.”

“I can’t tell you anything. What you’ve got to do is to get well as fast as you can, and show that husband of yours how you mean to be treated. If he says anything to me about taking you into the

bazaar, I'll give him a bit of my mind, I can tell you."

"He threatened—at least I thought that he 'was going to strike me just now."

"I knew it would not be long before it came to that. However, if he tries that again, you stand up to him and give him as good as you get. I should with Bainbridge, I know."

Poor Maude smiled even through her tears.

"I am afraid of him," she said.

"That's because you are ill. Wait till you get a little heart into you."

"Mrs. Bainbridge, you will stay with me, won't you?"

"That I will, my dear, as long as you ask me to. But here's the doctor. You must brighten up a bit for him"

All very well to say, but harder to accomplish after a sleepless night and two such scenes as she had just been through. And Dr. Collard noticed the change, and, as he left, beckoned the nurse out of earshot.

"What's amiss?" he asked. "She has gone back a deal since yesterday."

"And well she might, poor lamb, seeing all that has been going on under this roof. Her mother-in-law came to see her yesterday, and she and Mowlah Bux had a free fight in this room——"

"Husband and wife?"

"No, mother and son. And then he came in here half an hour since and bullied and threatened her till she is terrified half out of her wits. It's my opinion, sir, she will never get better unless that low fellow is kept out of the house."

"What can I do? After all, she is his wife."

"Well, in name she may be, but from what she tells me, not at heart, and they have never even been alone together since they married."

"What does it mean? Who is she, and why did she marry him?"

"She is a Miss Maude Ashley, a scholar, too, she tells me, who has been to Cambridge College and taken a degree."

"Maude Ashley? The lady wrangler? She can't be the same."

"That's the very word, sir. She said it only yesterday."

"Then, what, in heaven's name, is she doing here?"

"Of course, it is very hard to get at the truth, sir, but from what I can make out she thought she was going to benefit the women out here in some way."

"She'd better have let the men alone, at all events."

"She had indeed, sir, as she is finding out now."

"Poor girl!"

The tone of kindness in which he said it encouraged the nurse to speak out.

"If I might say it, I wish you could manage to say a word or two to her when you come here. She feels your silence dreadfully."

"What have I to talk about?"

"Anything, sir. But, next to her husband, the thing that's keeping her back most of all is the feeling that none of the ladies in the station will have anything to say to her."

"My good woman, I can't help that."

"Perhaps you could get even one of them to come and see her?"

But the doctor was a bachelor, without control over a single lady in the place. He knew the truth but did not care to say it, so he hastened to carry the discussion on to safer ground.

"I am afraid that is outside my province. However, I will see her husband and do my best to frighten him. Under the circumstances he is not giving her a chance. Good day, Mrs. Bainbridge."

And dreading some worse suggestion, he jumped into his trap and drove straight off to the courts, where he had a word or two with Mowlah Bux. He spoke, too, with such purpose that it ended by the husband's promising not even to enter the bungalow till the doctor said he might.

Collard told the nurse, who, of course, repeated the good tidings to Maude, who was thankful now for the absence which, when it was caused by neglect, had caused her pain. And as for Collard himself, the next day he began a new system. At every visit he would stop and chat for a few minutes with his patient in place of hurrying away as he had been wont to do.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE fact that Dr. Collard had no female belongings cut more ways than one. He was young, and Maude was (when in health) an exceptionally fascinating woman, so once the ice was broken they got on famously together. There was no one to ask him what he meant by showing any civility to "that creature," and as he got to know Maude better he was not ungrateful for the privilege (rare in India) of having the lady all to himself. Very shortly he began to look upon his evening visit to her as the pleasantest part of his day's work. He would drop in about five o'clock, at which hour Maude had tea ready for him, served in the daintiest possible fashion, thanks to her own forethought in providing herself with a proper tea service, with china to match. Mary Bainbridge was, of course, always present, sitting discreetly in the background, hard at work sewing sundry wonderfully constructed garments destined for her personal adornment, and she served the useful purpose of a watch-dog, who hereafter would preserve her patient from any unkind breath of scandal regarding her receiving company (albeit the doctor) at a time when her husband was forbidden the house.

This very absence or banishment of Mowlah Bux was welcome all round, but to his trebly unfortunate wife it was a perfect godsend. The rest and quiet, the freedom from worry, above all, the breath of that outer European world which the doctor brought her, helped Maude not only to throw off the evil effects of her sickness, but also to forget for the time her now hated environment of native life. Small wonder that she made rapid progress towards recovery, and delighted her nurse by the signs she showed of returning vigour alike of body and of mind, while she astonished her doctor by the many graces, mental and physical, which she possessed. Dr. Collard grew in his own heart a little ashamed of the way he had himself behaved in the past, more especially as he learned from her own lips a little—a good deal, in fact—of the history of her life and of her triumphs at college. For it was of the past that they mostly spoke, of all appertaining to that dear native land to which, after the manner of exiles, they were both secretly longing to return. By mutual consent the present, with its Mowlah Bux and its unforgiving society with the cruel social ban, was religiously tabooed. Often and often Maude would have liked to put the question which was always on the tip of her tongue, namely, why it was that her countrywomen held so sternly aloof? She had very little doubt of the cause, but she would have liked, as a moth loves to flicker round a candle to its own undoing, to put the question the answer to which must inevitably give her pain. And the man, for his part, was putting a check on his own curiosity

as to what had brought her there, and what she, a highly-educated, refined English lady, hoped or expected to do among such people as surrounded her, or would surround her the moment he himself raised the embargo which kept her husband for the moment out of the way.

But both of them were afraid to touch on topics which might in an instant shatter the growing fabric of their friendship, and bring them back to the hard work-a-day world which for the moment they were both anxious to forget.

No wonder, too, that the declaration of Maude's complete recovery was indefinitely postponed. It was no business of the doctor's to hurry on a consummation which, in the best interests of his patient, he felt was better delayed. As for Maude, she had had a very severe illness, and, though outwardly convalescent, was far from feeling sure that she was herself again. On every ground they preferred to let matters drift.

Once or twice she was strongly tempted to take the kind little man into her confidence and to ask him to help her to arrange with Colonel Eustace for her immediate return to England. For the more closely she came to examine the matter, the more resolute she felt to nullify this truly hateful tie, the harder it seemed to be to do. She was by no means sure of her ground, horribly uncertain what hold an unsympathetic law might give her husband over herself. And still more did the fact that she was in a strange land, many thousand miles from home, and under a law which (as the *vakil* had been careful

to explain to her) differed in some essentials from that of England, help to terrify and dishearten her. Besides, what claim had she on the doctor's services? It is always a delicate matter to interfere between husband and wife, and a complete stranger might well refuse to enter upon a task fraught with so many dangers and worries to himself. On the whole, she judged it far wiser to await the Colonel's arrival, he being the one man on whom, in right of his kindness and (by a strange contradiction) his relationship to good John Strachey, she had any claim.

As for the particular branch of society which inhabited Khurruckpore, it held sternly aloof—fine type of prejudice, far from indefensible in its own way, but obstinate and ill-discriminating none the less. Society, 'as represented by its Khurruckpore section, voted this creature who had disgraced her sex by marrying a native a person to be held in her proper place, one in no respect fitted to mingle with its own chaste and irreproachable daughters and sisters. It had always been a rule, inviolable as those of the Medes and Persians, that the European lady who took this hateful step went under for ever and a day. Indian society must be held pure and immaculate, so the good women, kind in their hearts, honest in intention, firm in their friendships, and priceless helpers in the hour of need, dismissed Maude from their thoughts. They could swallow a good deal, could accept the scandalmonger, the backbiter, the roué, and even close their ears to the little breath of scandal regarding one of themselves, but they had no pity, no helping hand for the innocent English

girl, who, in full ignorance of what she was doing, had voluntarily forsaken her father's house, and gone among strangers of another race and creed.

And so the days rolled on, and the weather grew a little cooler, and Dr. Collard made up his mind that it was useless to suggest, so late in the season, a change to the hills. Maude was really better now, well enough to take a little interest in her house, to banish much of the Parsi's furniture, and, with the aid of her own few nicknacks and some judicious advice from Mrs. Bainbridge (who was more learned in such things, and who had seen how Indian drawing-rooms are furnished) to transform the erstwhile hideous parlour into a fairly habitable room. Morning and evening now she took drives, not into more than the outskirts of the bazaar, for Mary Bainbridge was afraid to let her see how and in what surroundings Mowlah Bux lived, but along the leafy cantonment roads with their wealth of trees, and through the outskirts of the great city, covered with historic monuments, and once (for the nurse saw her pain and stopped it) right through the public garden, when the evening tennis was in full swing, and every soul in the cantonment was collected to chat, drink tea, or play. The sight of this gathering, from which she was inexorably cut off, had brought a cloud to Maude's face. She was silent and preoccupied for the rest of the drive, and they never went there in the evening again. But this easy-going state of things could not go on for ever. Indeed, Mowlah Bux, growing impatient for the carrying out of certain unmentionable schemes of his own for coercing his

poor wife, had actually sought out Dr. Collard, and put it to him point-blank whether his wife was not now as completely herself as she could hope to be for some time to come, and whether there was any reason why he should continue to stay away. Dr. Collard, caught off his guard, and conscious that the cold eyes of his native colleague, Rahim Khan, were upon him, possibly gauging the value of the answer on his friend's behalf, had shuffled, and ended by asking for only three days more, next Monday, in fact. Nor was Maude much happier. She felt that the crisis could not be much longer delayed, and cautious inquiries only revealed the fact that Colonel Eustace was still expected—had not arrived as yet.

So our two friends were both uneasy when they met as usual one eventful Saturday at afternoon-tea.

"I saw your husband this morning," quoth the doctor, sipping his tea.

He was watching her furtively all the time to see how she would take the announcement.

"Did you?" coldly waiting for something further.

"Yes, and he wants to know how soon you will be well enough for him to return."

"And what did you answer?" She was a shade paler now, and there was a ring of anxiety in her voice.

"She does not like the notion," he thought as he answered, "I gave no definite answer. I said he could ask me again on Monday next."

"Forty - eight hours," she muttered, half to herself.

"Yes, but I will not let him come unless you

feel equal to the strain of seeing him," he said significantly.

"No. Perhaps it is best to let him come," she said gravely. "It will have to be got over sooner or later."

"But, after all, it need only be a trial trip, so to speak. Of course you know Miss—that is, Mrs. Ashley"—(her name by mutual consent; neither could give tongue to Mrs. Mowlah Bux)—"I should not wish in any way to try and force your confidence, but I know how you were excited last time, and, as your medical attendant, I feel it my duty to forbid your exposing yourself to any risk of a relapse."

"Dr. Collard, am I well?"

"A difficult question to answer."

"Yes or no?"

"You are too definite. I am not used to such cross-examination," he said, forcing a smile, "but, if you will let me give you my answer in my own words, I may make the position clear to you."

"Very well, do so."

"Then, I may tell you that, always barring a relapse, you are as well as anything but time can make you. But this illness you have had is a perfect scourge to us out here. It obtains among Europeans perhaps more victims than any other. Moreover, it is severe, its after-effects lasting, and, to say no more, it will require the greatest care and attention on your part, for many a day to come, if you would make a perfect cure."

"I suppose so. Well, then, it is either a case of

getting this thing over at once, or of postponing the time indefinitely?"

"Just so. And I may remind you that my decision is final, and that with me your wish is law."

She thought for a minute or two before she answered, and he anxiously awaited what she might decide.

"You are very good and kind," she said in a low, tired voice, very different to the vivacity she usually displayed, "but, supposing I say 'no,' how do you suppose my husband will take it?"

"I daresay he will be angry. I gathered as much from his manner to-day, but that is quite immaterial."

"It is good of you to say so, but why should I expose you to all this annoyance, because" (with a nervous little laugh which sounded very pitiful in his ears) "I am such a coward that I want to put off the evil day?"

It was more than she quite meant to say, but she was in great distress of mind, and hardly able to pick her words. Anyway, he caught up the phrase, and made the most of it.

"That is nothing," he said eagerly, "nothing at all. Believe me, if I were certain that you did look upon this as an evil day, I would soon put a stopper on his manœuvres. If you feel you need protection, you shall have it."

"How?"

"Well, to be candid, I don't quite know how at this moment, but trust me to find a way. Let me remind you that a doctor's fiat regarding his patient is very

powerful, almost as powerful as that of the law which supports him. This your—that is, Mowlah Bux knows as well as I do, or he would have been here annoying you long since. A hint from me to those in authority will safeguard you for the time.”

“Only putting off the evil day,” she said sadly.

“Very much so, but the action of the law can supplant that in time.”

He paused, took a couple of turns up and down the room, and then faced her again.

“Mrs. Ashley, I have never sought your confidence, and I can quite see that you are wiser to keep it to yourself. Your position is one which I frankly confess that I cannot even pretend to understand. But this I will say that I can see that you have already repented of this unholy bargain—I beg your pardon, I should say this unlucky step which you have taken. I am only your doctor, of course, but a medical man often gets an inkling of a patient’s private concerns, and has to remedy his fortunes as he remedies his body. So you must not mind my speaking, still less must you think of any possible annoyance to me. If you wish to be protected a little longer, say the word and the thing is done.”

“You are very kind and considerate, but all I want is a little more time. I cannot give you my confidence as I should like to—yet—but if the help I am hoping for does not come, I will tell you my story and let you see whether I am more deserving of the pity or contempt of my countrywomen, not one of whom has stirred a finger to help me now in my need.”

“I have no doubt of that. But is it to be delay?”

"Yes, if it can be done quietly."

"The thing is simple enough. Next week is the *Eed*. It won't last long, but it is hardly a time when you should be dragged into the midst of these people, or when your husband will much mind the delay."

"A week, then, be it. What is the *Eed* though?"

"One of their festivals, and generally a pretty rowdy time here, with religious faction fights—Mohammedan against Hindu, and Christian keeping the peace by force of arms."

"I had heard something of it. At all events, I am to have a week's reprieve?"

"Yes, and as much longer as you like. Remember that now or at any other time I shall be only too glad to help you."

"I am deeply grateful for your kindness, and I am sure that I could not have a better friend. And now, while I remember it, let me ask another question. Talking of festivals has reminded me that I, too, should like to go to church to-morrow. Do you see any objection?"

"Are you quite sure that you feel strong enough?" he asked.

"Quite. That is a very different matter to the other."

"I thought perhaps you might not feel equal to the task of facing so many strangers," he suggested significantly.

"You mean unfriendly faces? I cannot help that. I mean to go to show that I am not ashamed of myself, and" (with a short laugh) "I shall take Mrs. Bainbridge with me, in case their unfriendliness should make me faint."

"As you like," he said, shaking hands to go; "I will come to you on Monday to tell you the result."

"Thanks very much. I am just going out for a drive. Good night."

"A plucky girl," thought the doctor, as he mounted his cart, "but little does she know these confounded women she has to deal with. If they could, they would eat her alive for what they think she has done."

CHAPTER XX.

DR. COLLARD understood, better than Maude herself, the class of ordeal she would have to face. Although Mowlah Bux's wife knew nothing about Khurruckpore society, society knew a good deal about her. An Indian station is a very small community, and so unusual an event as the arrival of an English-woman who had married a native was not to be overlooked. They would have been interested in any case, but when they had the authority of no less a person than the doctor himself for the statement that this outrageous woman was a lady by birth, a Cambridge graduate, and of considerable personal attractions, they had every excuse for thoroughly thrashing out so promising a bit of gossip. And, thanks to that singular lack of privacy which is the curse of an Indian household, every soul in the place knew that Maude had arrived, that she had been ill, and that already she was on bad terms with her husband. For the rest, while piously hoping that the creature would have the decency to keep to herself, Khurruckpore was none the less determined that, come what might, it would have

nothing to do with one who had so misconducted herself.

Imagine, therefore, the class of excitement created by the arrival of the offender in church, as bold as brass, looking decidedly handsome, and clad in becoming garments of a decidedly newer fashion than anything which society could boast on its own account. Maude and her escort arrived just as the service was about to commence, and it is no exaggeration to say that, from that moment, the eyes of every soul in the congregation (not even excepting those of the parson at such times as there was any chanting being done by the choir) were fixed upon her. A new face is always something in India. A new face under such conditions is a good deal. And as the lateness of her arrival and the limited accommodation had combined to force her into a most prominent position—in front of one of the transepts, and right under the eye of the whole congregation—it was not very long before she began to feel the justice of the warning she had received.

No daughter of Eve is indifferent to the attention of her fellows, whether the respectful admiration of the male animal for her charms, the envy of her dress displayed by women, or the hostility of her sisters to her personally. Maude saw that every eye within range was fixed on her poor self, and that every woman present was trying her best to express the bitter scorn she felt for this rank offender against all recognised custom. She knew that the men were not quite so aggressive as the women, but even their

admiration of her charms was tempered by wrath and indignation that she should have thrown herself away on one of the subject people. It was to her a most trying experience, and one which she doubted her power ever to repeat. She did her best to confine her attention to the service, and to seem unconcerned, but the task was beyond her strength. Do what she would she felt uncomfortable, and she was much relieved when the service came to an end, and the clergyman pronounced the blessing (at her personally, so it seemed to her) and dismissed them to their own homes.

She had not dared to look at the people, and even if she had done so she could not have seen one particular individual whom she would have been most glad to see, but who was hidden behind an angle of the building. It was only as the church began to empty that she became aware of the presence of the one man she had been longing to see for days past, and who, even then, did not happen to see her. Hoping to be rid of her tormentors, for such they became in virtue of their staring her out of countenance for a good hour or more, she thought she would let them file out of the church and get away before she herself moved. So she pulled down her veil and leaned back in her seat, getting as far as possible behind good Mary Bainbridge's ample person, which, in truth, formed a most effective screen. But she could herself see, though there was not at first anything to particularly attract her attention. The officers of the different regiments clattered past first, clinking their swords on the stone

floor and making a most abominable row. Then followed sundry of the ladies and children, and then one or two more military officers, clad in long frock-coats of dark blue, and wearing (so it seemed to the girl's inexperienced eyes) gold crossbelts of a more expensive type than those worn by any of the others. The last of this group, which was led by the General, easily distinguishable by his broad gold waistbelt, was the man she had been hoping against hope to see for this last fortnight or more, her friend Colonel Eustace himself. Maude was so surprised, for she had never expected to see him there, that it was with difficulty that she could repress a start. Then, recovering herself, she drew into her corner more closely than before, shocked beyond measure that he, of all men, should have been a witness of this, her first appearance in public in Khurruckpore, and of the silent, but none the less effectual, humiliation to which she had been exposed.

Apparently he had not seen her, since he walked straight forward, and followed the General, without looking either to the right or left. So anxious was Maude to avoid him that she plucked her companion by the sleeve, and whispered to her to wait till the crowd had dispersed.

Mrs. Bainbridge nodded her acquiescence, and there the pair sat till the music of the bands outside apprised them that the troops had started on their homeward march. Then the nurse, in her turn, leaned across and said that the time had arrived when they had better move, which they did, much to the relief of the two church officials, the European

clerk and the native bearer, whose business it was to lock up the building, and who were becoming doubtful whether this last couple ever meant to go away.

Things outside had not, as it chanced, progressed quite so fast as Mrs. Bainbridge thought. True, the troops were all gone, but there still lingered in the compound a number of the residents, engaged, *more suo*, in enjoying a brief gossip even under the shadow of the church. As Maude stepped through the doorway she found her further road was to be under the unkind eyes of the very people who had already made her regret having ever come. But there was no escape, as she saw. She must run the gauntlet of them all.

As she made her appearance on the top of the steps every eye was 'turned in her direction—unkind eyes, too, every one of them. Then, as she descended the steps, the first person she recognised was a doctor's wife who had been her cabin mate on board the "Siam," and whom that unkind fate which keeps the Medical Department ever on the roll in a sort of dreary perpetual motion had sent to Khurruckpore a few weeks previously. In vain the friendless woman looked for any sign of recognition. The doctor's wife could not in any single point compare with the outcast she was too proud to know; but as Maude made a half-smile, half-bow, of recognition, she turned and looked the other way. This was not encouraging, but it was hardly worse than the treatment she received from the rest. Every eye glanced unutterable scorn, every nose sniffed defiance as the social

outcast slowly made her way across the open space to the hired conveyance which was waiting for her on the further side.

With a heart more filled with indignation than with shame—for what had she, poor girl, to be ashamed of?—Maude got into her carriage, into which (though with more deliberation) Mrs. Bainbridge also climbed. And as they started Maude, leaning well back, remembered that this was, after all, only a repetition of her wedding day.

The vehicle—a hired conveyance yeclapt there a “phittun” (*Anglice*, phaeton) gharry—was drawn by two ill-groomed, ill-fed quadrupeds, kept for profit, not for show. The Jehu was hired by the hour, and therefore in no hurry, for the ways of cabmen are the same all over the world. As the seedy turnout crawled slowly towards the main road, it passed three pedestrians who lived near enough to prefer to walk even in that lazy land. One of the trio was a stout Major of native infantry, another was his pretty girl-wife, and the third was Colonel Eustace himself. The sound of wheels caused all three to turn their heads, and, as they did so, for the first time Eustace became aware that Maude had made one of the congregation in church. The recognition was mutual. Sore with her many rebuffs, and almost dreading that this man, too, the sheet anchor of her day-dreams for a long time past, might scorn to know the outcast, Maude was half inclined to feign not to recognise him. But (with what a relief, it may be imagined) she saw that here, at last, she had a friend. A white-gloved hand flashed up to the Colonel’s helmet peak in

military salute, a kind face smiled recognition, while Maude bowed with gratitude in her heart beyond all words. Nay more, the portly Major's hand followed the example of his friend's as in courtesy bound, the pretty English girl-wife's face showed more surprise than scorn, and the carriage rolled away, leaving the rest of Khurruckpore society aghast at the horrible fact that the new Adjutant-General, Fortune's favourite, the man from Simla, beloved of all Anglo-Indian magnates, had, *coram publico*, bowed to this creature whom they all refused to know.

Perhaps the Colonel understood the sensation he was creating. Any way, his lady companion meant that he should. As the carriage rolled away, silence fell on the trio, Eustace congratulating himself, the stout Major quietly chuckling over the joke, and his wife casting about in her own mind to find some excuse for raising the question and bringing the offender to book.

She was not an ill-natured little woman this, far from it. If she had been let alone she would have been right enough, but she had allowed herself to be over-persuaded by the rest; Maude and her evil doings had been dinned into her ears any time these six weeks, and, failing any defence offered by, or on behalf of, the culprit, she had actually come to believe that it was as bad as she had been told. So she was feeling a little ruffled on her own account, being doubtful how far this behaviour of the Colonel's was or was not an impertinence to herself, all the more reprehensible in that he was at the moment her guest.

"Who was that, Colonel Eustace?" she asked, with an air of innocence.

"A lady I knew at home."

"What is her name? She must be a stranger here, as I do not remember seeing her before."

The question was a hard one to answer, for a reason already explained. The Colonel took a middle course.

"Miss Ashley," he said.

"Oh, indeed. I thought for a moment it was that horrid woman who has recently come to live in the civil lines, and who (so I am told) has actually married a native."

"You are perfectly correct," replied Eustace, quietly. "Miss Ashley (I give her her maiden name as I don't know her other) is married to a native."

"And you know her still?"

"Why not? She is an old friend of mine, and a lady for whom I have the highest regard."

"Oh!"

"I see that I am puzzling you, Mrs. Fairfax. Let me explain. Miss Ashley is a very highly cultured and clever lady, who, from mistaken motives, but none the less from a high idea of her duty in life, has married a native."

The other had learned her lesson pretty well.

"That is a thing not to be explained away," she said. "And under the circumstances I don't see how you can know her any longer, or how any lady can permit her to be mentioned in her presence."

And the girl-wife's face grew scarlet, partly from excitement, partly from indignation. Her husband

glanced across at his friend to see how he would take the lecture, but the Colonel only looked sad and grave.

"If you knew Miss Ashley as well as I do, Mrs. Fairfax," he said, "you would at once recognise that she is rather to be pitied than despised. So far as I am concerned, I should never dream of cutting her now when she so sorely needs every friend she has."

"That is a man's way of looking at things."

"I accept the definition, even though it redounds but little to the credit of your own sex for charity," replied the Colonel, looking gravely at her as he added, "The cavalry here are a very smart lot, Fairfax; as well turned out as any I have seen."

Edith Fairfax bit her lip. She was beginning to find out that the Colonel not only had opinions of his own which he was not ashamed of, but at a pinch could say the hardest things in the politest way, and with a smiling face. But she was learning Indian wisdom, poor girl, and knew that, for her husband's sake, she ought to try not to offend him. Still, for the moment she was too angry to be able to answer him.

CHAPTER XXI.

FROM the moment when Colonel Eustace saw the announcement of Maude Ashley's marriage in the *Times of India* at Bombay to that when he again set eyes on her outside the Khurruckpore church, she had never been altogether out of his mind. He had, indeed, thought a good deal more about her than he should have done, or than was quite satisfactory to his peace of mind. And, as the image of the girl he had so nearly asked to be his wife floated before his vision, he would ask himself whether it would not have been a preferable fate for this fair English girl, who (to use a fine old mediæval simile) had sold herself to the devil, to have been drowned in the Indian Ocean than to eke out the life of lingering misery which marriage with such a man as Mowlah Bux was bound to be.

The official life of India is kaleidoscopic in its changes at times. A great man dies, or falls sick, or takes leave, and the powers that be give the glorious apparition yecept the staff a shaking, and the arrangement in red and gold falls without effort into a new combination. The favourite nephew of the wife of a Member of Council had been (in the opinion

of his aunt) languishing too long in such outer darkness as is the lot of a staff corps subaltern in a native infantry regiment on the frontier. Ladies don't think much of the honour or usefulness of a career, they only look to the solid advantages of the moment. So, when the general commanding a certain military district fell sick and had to go to England, this is what occurred.

First of all, the vacant place was very properly taken by a grey-haired colonel of a native infantry regiment, who had fought with distinction in every campaign since the Mutiny, but who had no friends in high places. This was what they call out there a temporary measure. So Colonel Jamieson temporarily attained the height of his ambition, but he was only officiating, and in due course would fall back into his proper place till such time as he took his off-reckonings, or died. But another distinguished official had a cousin who had been tried on the staff and found wanting—therefore he was just the man to command a regiment. His appointment also would only be temporary, as it was to a place where nobody else particularly wanted to go; but this would be the prelude to the command of a Ghoorkha regiment in the hills. And so one might follow the shuffling of the cards through all its phases, but it must suffice to add the cases of only two more, one a young gentleman whose solitary claim to preferment was his having painted scenery for, and acted in, some private theatricals at Simla, and having thereafter won the heart of the hostess (a very great personage, indeed) by finishing his good work by sending sketches of

the performance to an illustrated paper at home; the other, that of Colonel Eustace, C.B., who was thrown in to leaven the whole arrangement, and ordered from Simla to act as senior staff officer at Khurruckpore.

He had happened to be engaged on some rather important work at the time, which had delayed his start. Hence the delay which had so wrung poor Maude's heart with anxiety for the success of her own plans. But now he was arrived, safely deposited per Indian mail train the evening before, and, till such time as he could find a resting-place of his own, was the guest of his old friend Fairfax and the latter's pretty wife.

The Major, who was actually an older man than his senior in rank, had married recently, and Eustace had not previously met the bride. It says something for Edith Fairfax that the Colonel, usually so critical and hard to please, should have been delighted with his old friend's choice. Within a few hours of his arrival he had formed a plan. He knew Maude was at Khurruckpore, he knew instinctively that by this time she must be badly in want of a friend, and he decided that here was the very friend she wanted ready to hand. Fairfax, he knew, was one of these stout, good-natured, easy-going souls whose proudest boast is that they don't care a rap for what anybody says, does, or thinks regarding any action of their own. His young wife could hardly yet have imbibed the prejudices of the average Anglo-Indian against such a marriage as Maude's. They were about the same age, had very similar ideas, and, if he could manage it, should be brought to see things in the same light.

Alas for his schemes! The ladies of Khurruckpore had been beforehand with the woman he hoped to make Maude Ashley's friend. Before his arrival Mrs. Fairfax was thoroughly primed with all the arguments against the marriage, had (as her thoughtful neighbours would have put it) her eyes well opened to the full enormity of the woman's offence. But, after all, there was this in his favour, that Major Fairfax "did not care a rap." As they sat at their late breakfast (church at that hot season having taken place at eight o'clock) he rushed boldly into the subject over which once already his wife and guest had nearly come to words.

"That was a good-looking girl, Eustace, that friend of yours." "

"Which?" asked the Colonel innocently, while his hostess frowned.

"The one in the 'tikkha' with the old woman in the brown victorine."

"George, what will you say next? What on earth is a victorine?" asked Edith.

"Don't you call it by that name now?" said the Major. "I wish your fashions did not change so quickly. It's the same old thing coming back, but you never call it by the old name. From a chignon to a bun, from a garibaldi to a blouse, I don't see much difference. I mean the tippit."

"It was not a tippit, it was a mantle," said his wife reproachfully.

"Well, if you know all about it, why could you not say so?" he answered. "Anyway, I repeat that she was a very good-looking girl."

"George, if you insist on discussing those sort of people I shall have to leave the table."

Major Fairfax ceased to smile.

"My dear child, what are you talking about? I understood Eustace to say that she was married to a native. What is the harm in mentioning her name?"

"You know quite well what I mean. Is it right or proper to compare the marriage ceremony of the Christian Church with what these people do—hopping a broomstick or some such thing?" she added, unconsciously quoting from some rather highly-seasoned remarks of a rather highly-seasoned Anglo-Indian lady which she had chanced to overhear the day before.

"My good child, you are new to the country, so we must excuse your ignorance. But let me tell you that the marriages of the Hindus and Mohammedans (and I don't know which this particular case was) are perfectly valid by the law, and are recognised as such by every one."

"Not by right-thinking people," she answered, her woman's obstinacy refusing to give in.

"Right-thinking fiddlesticks! The law is the only arbiter in such matters," replied her husband warmly.

"I may as well tell you that the marriage took place in the Cathedral at Bombay," said Eustace, quietly interposing for the first time.

Mrs. Fairfax was disconcerted. Eustace was a tactician. He brought up overwhelming force at the decisive moment, and his simple statement accomplished what the Major had failed to effect.

But, all the same, his fair adversary was quick in returning to the charge.

"That is only the law again, not the Christian religion. Only one of the two contracting parties could possibly have understood what a sacred thing our sacrament of marriage is. *That* is my point, Colonel Eustace. I think it is shocking, an awful thing for a professedly Christian woman—I cannot say lady—to accept as the companion of her life a heathen who laughs at all she has been taught to consider most sacred."

"Mrs. Fairfax, you have been well coached."

"No—that is, of course I have heard others talking about this most deplorable affair—I put it that way as I don't wish to say anything that would hurt your feelings."

"You can't hurt my feelings. And let me tell you that you cannot possibly deplore this marriage more than I do."

"How is that possible when you defend it?"

"I don't defend it. I defend the woman, Miss Ashley, and I deplore it for reasons very different to what yours are, but which I hardly care to advance just now."

"But do, please. I am most anxious to hear them."

"Fire away, Eustace. Your guns are a bit too heavy for hers, I know, but, like the rest of us, she has to learn. Just tell her straight out why you are sorry. So far, she has heard only the other women's version of the story."

"George, you are horrid. Do you suppose I can't form impressions for myself? Go on, Colonel Eustace."

I always like to hear other people's reasons, even when there is no hope of my agreeing with them. Why do you deplore this marriage?"

"If you are only prompted by curiosity, I would rather not speak," he said.

"No, please go on. I should like to hear, though I can see you are prejudiced in this Miss Ashley's favour."

"Heaven knows I have little reason to be so then," he answered gravely. "Should you be surprised to hear that she did her best to break the heart, that she certainly has succeeded in souring the life, of the man for whom I have the greatest regard on earth?"

They were all three grave enough by now. The Major asked the next question.

"Who was that, Eustace? Do I know him?" he asked.

"I don't think so. But you may have heard me speak of John Strachey."

"Your cousin?"

"Exactly. The man whose intended marriage took me home the other day."

"But if he is married, what has this other woman to do with him?"

"He is not married. She jilted him in the most capricious fashion a few days before the wedding was to have taken place."

"For this native fellow?"

"Yes, and no."

"Don't talk riddles. Say what you mean."

"She jilted him to marry this native; but I give you my word that I don't believe she cared a bit more for the one than for the other."

"What was it? Sulks?"

"Nothing of the sort. She married an ideal."

"An ideal hinging on her marriage with a native? Heaven help her," quoth the Major piously.

"Go on, Colonel Eustace," said the Major's wife.

"Mrs. Fairfax, I appeal to you for justice for this unhappy girl," he answered. "Here let me state her case. She is the victim of over-education, brought up by a father who looked on culture and learning as something far greater and more important than a woman's true mission in life, which is to be a happy wife and mother. He thought that the best way to prepare his daughter to buffet the storms of life was to cram her head with theories and tables of statistics proving that everything that ever had been done was wrong. He never showed her the weak side of humanity; such a thing as human frailty or human weakness, and, above all, the limits placed upon human power never entered into his scheme of education. He turned her out a perfect encyclopedia, full of red-hot theories bran-new from the intellectual forge. And when he died, poor man, he left her educated to perfection, according to the professorial standard, but as ignorant of actual life as a babe in arms."

"Go on, Colonel Eustace."

"Above all things, he never foresaw that a time must come (and that speedily) when all this book work would lie fermenting in her brain without an outlet, panting and striving for a career. We have not as yet come to the time when the professions are as open to your sex as they are to ours. Maude Ashley had a triumphal march at school and college;

she did not know what failure meant, supposed, in fact, she *could* not fail. She knows it now, or I am very much mistaken."

"And what has taught her?"

"A little experience—a thing which, when compared with all those nonsensical theories with which her head had been stuffed before, is in value as Lombard Street to a China orange. But I must go on in my own way. Miss Ashley, in her search for a career, thought first of all that she would find it in the East-end of London. It was about this time that she met my cousin John Strachey, the hard-working rector of an East-end parish. She attracted him, and he attracted her—so far, that is, as an alliance with him seemed to open up to her the prospect of this precious career. But then, just as if a curse lay on her, this Mowlah Bux crossed her path in his turn. Mrs. Fairfax, you don't know the type, but your husband and I do. He appeared to her inexperienced a man glib of tongue, persuasive, with an idealised manner, and a marvellous command of big English words. For all I know to the contrary, he may be a worthy man, a good man according to his lights, but all the same he is one who, in the very nature of things, as one of a conquered race, only pretends to assimilate the customs of the hated conquerors as a means to an end. He hoped that so long as he could acquire a gloss of Western civilisation he would stand well with us, not so much out here in India as at home, and in the course of the process he met this unhappy girl. What he told her I do not know—I can only guess, but it would be something deftly

combining the imagery of the East with the latest accepted theories of the West. What followed is easy to tell. Miss Ashley fancied that here, indeed, was her career (she told me as much as that), so she jilted my cousin, and when I next met her she was on her way to marry Mowlah Bux."

"Thank you. You have certainly explained how she came here, and in a way which puts matters in a somewhat different light. But now finish it, and tell me what you expect to be the end of this marriage."

"Everything bad. It takes a long time to learn everything necessary to a right understanding of this thing. That I must leave to time and to your husband to teach you——"

"Thank you, old fellow," ejaculated the Major.

"I will merely add that the whole question turns on the fact that in their treatment of their women the natives are centuries behind us—if, indeed, we were ever half so bad as they are to-day. Mrs. Fairfax, I daresay you have thought that social ostracism and the loss of the companionship of her own people was the worst that was going to overtake this poor lady who has so provoked your wrath?"

"In a measure, yes. Anyway it is bad enough."

"It is at worst but half her trouble. Imagine a woman to whom the theory that women were in most respects—intellectually, at all events—the equals of men has been the A B C of her training suddenly thrown into a society in which the women are not merely repressed but kept out of sight, shut up in kennels in which you would hesitate to keep a well-bred English dog, and denied any companionship but

that of a few old women, a few younger rivals in the affections of their lord and master, with a very occasional visit from some degraded old crone whose profession it is to carry scandal from house to house. Yet, carried to its legitimate conclusion, that is the position of Miss Ashley to-day. What do you think of it?"

"It is rather terrifying."

"Rather terrifying? It is awful beyond words. Mrs. Fairfax, believe me that if 'her offence is rank and cries to heaven,' if in entering on this marriage she has degraded her race, and, above all, herself, there hangs over her head a punishment more awful than that which any of the gossips who pick her to pieces here every day could of themselves devise. It is a punishment which enters into every moment of her life, which permeates (drenches is a better word, perhaps) every phase of her existence. We all make mistakes, we all sin and ask to be forgiven. It would take a rare bigot to call hers a sin, but no man can deny its being a mistake, and one the consequences of which are too awful to contemplate; one, from which, humanly speaking, there is no escape."

"Thank you. You have put the matter in quite a new light."

"That is nothing. I only hope, Mrs. Fairfax, that I may have done a good deal more than that—that I may have proved to you that this poor lady is to be more pitied than blamed, to be helped and comforted rather than made the butt of unkind scorn. We all have our troubles. Would to God we were more

lenient to each other—to those worse off than ourselves.”

Mrs. Fairfax made no answer, but presently she rose and went away.

“I am glad you spoke out, Eustace,” said the Major, after she was gone. “The daws have been pecking at that poor creature this two months past, and it is time that some one took her part.”

CHAPTER XXII.

SIMULTANEOUSLY the same idea, the wish for a meeting, entered the heads of two people in Khurruckpore. Colonel Eustace was most anxious to hear from Maude Ashley's own lips how she had fared since they parted in Bombay, while, for her part, the girl felt that not a moment was to be lost before she opened up communications with the one man in India whom she could depend upon, and asked his assistance in carrying out that great scheme of hers for making her escape.

As for Maude, she surprised Mrs. Bainbridge by informing her that she meant to go to church again in the evening. When the nurse offered to accompany her, the offer was declined with thanks.

"I am sure," said Maude laughingly, "that you only offer to come to oblige me, but, if you like, I will drive you down to the church, and the carriage can take you on to your own house, and you can come back to fetch me when you think the service will be done."

And so it was arranged, and Colonel Eustace, when he walked into church with his friends, spied the object of his search already seated in her place.

At the conclusion of the service he whispered to his hostess that he was not going to walk home with her.

"Will you excuse my not walking back with you, Mrs. Fairfax?" he asked. "I am going across to speak to Miss Ashley. If she is alone I shall very likely see her home, but I shall be back to dinner without fail."

"Certainly," was the most unexpected reply; "but do you think your friend would like me to be introduced to her?"

The answer was surprising—as surprising as gratifying to the Colonel's vanity. It would have been impossible to produce a stronger proof of his eloquence or the power with which he had pleaded his protégée's cause. But he could not accept the kind offer for reasons of his own, though he took good care that the lady should have no doubt of his gratitude for the proposal.

"Please not to-night," he said. "I want so to have a chat with her, and she would doubtless be embarrassed before you. Some other time."

"Some other time, then, be it," said Mrs. Fairfax, as they rose to leave the church, the Colonel triumphant in the notion that already he was fighting Maude's battles to some purpose. This *volte face* of his hostess was surprising to him who did not know the hidden springs.

The truth was that that afternoon, when he had retired to write some letters, Edith Fairfax had surprised her husband alone with a cigar.

"George, have you any objection to my knowing this Miss Ashley that was?"

"None whatever, little woman. Why should I?"

"I did not know. Every one else seemed to make such a dead-set against her. I had never given the matter a thought until Colonel Eustace spoke out to-day. But I have been thinking about it, and it all seems so very dreadful—that poor woman so deceived, and now abandoned by us all, and left alone with the natives. I thought that, as I was so happy, I ought to try to do something to make her happy, too. You are sure you would not mind?"

"Mind? Why should I?"

"The other ladies might say unkind things, I thought."

"Let them. So far from minding, Edie, I am only too glad that you are fresh enough from home not to be steeped in their prejudices, and strong-willed enough to have an opinion of your own. Mind, I don't say that I approve of these mixed marriages—which are an invention of the devil—but I can quite see how the girl has been trapped, and because this native scoundrel deserves horsewhipping, that is no reason why we should go out of our way to be unkind to his wife. Know her by all means, if you like." And the easy-going, kindly Major felt himself well rewarded by the kiss which his wife, leaning over the back of his chair, imprinted on his forehead.

"Thank you, George," she said. "I will get Colonel Eustace to introduce me. That will be the best way, I think."

And, full of her charitable designs, she had been quite ready to put them into execution then and there after evening church. But she understood the

Colonel's wish to see his friend alone, and, as she led the way out of the church, when her eye fell upon Maude, who sat silently observing the worshippers, the poor girl suddenly became aware that here at least was one—young, pretty, near her own age—whose looks said nothing of contempt, but caused her to form the sudden wish that they two, at least, might be friends. But she had other things to think of, for Eustace, anxious not to miss her, stopped at her pew's end and waited for her to join him, which she forthwith did. The shades of night were beginning to fall as the pair stepped out into the compound. It was almost too dark for people to recognise each other, and Maude was not sorry that it should be so in view of her experience of that morning. But even then it did not seem quite so bad, now that she had her one friend by her side.

"How do you do, Miss Ashley? You see it has not been very long before we two meet again."

"No, indeed, but I was very much surprised when I heard you were coming here."

"Well, anyway, here I am, and, what is more, I am going to see you home. Are you walking?"

"I have a carriage here——"

"Oh, a tikkha. Well, let him follow us. He will do to take me home afterwards, as I daresay you know every one walks home here from evening church."

"Will you kindly tell him? I could not make him understand. That is the man with the two grey horses."

Eustace did as he was asked, and then turned to his companion again.

"You cannot have made much progress with the language," he said. "I should have imagined that you, of all people living, would have picked it up very fast."

"I have not had much chance."

"How so?" in surprise.

"I have been ill ever since I reached Khurruck-pore."

"I am sorry to hear that. What has been the matter?"

"Enteric fever."

"You don't say so. I thought you were looking pale, but every one looks so washed out here that I put it down to climate. It never occurred to me to think of anything worse. It is no use asking you how you picked it up—that is a puzzle to the doctors themselves. But when did you get it? You seem to have got rid of it very quickly."

"It was brought on by the journey from Bombay, so Dr. Collard thinks."

"Excuse me, but is Collard your civil surgeon here?"

"Yes."

"I am glad to hear it. He is an excellent fellow. I know him well, and I am sure you could not be in better hands. But pardon the interruption, and please go on."

"We travelled here straight from the church door the evening I landed."

"The first week in June, too. I must say your husband ought to have been"—he was on the point of saying "hanged for his trouble," but he substituted—"more considerate."

"I was taken ill the first moment we reached the bungalow, and am not really better yet."

"There's worse to come," thought Eustace, but he said out loud, "You have made a wonderful recovery. They must have taken good care of you."

The speech seemed to rouse all the latent sense of injury in Maude Ashley's heart.

"Take care of me? Who? Do you know, Colonel Eustace, my husband hardly came near me; at first would have denied me a European doctor if he could? Do you know that since I have been sick, lying for days at death's door, not a soul has been to ask if they could help; while as for the man I have married he has behaved in such a way that Dr. Collard has forbidden him the house? If I have pulled through at all, I owe it under Providence to two people and to them alone—the one the doctor himself, who has been most attentive and kind; the other a good, kind creature he brought me as nurse, a common soldier's wife, a Mrs. Bainbridge——"

"Not Mary Bainbridge of the Royal Blanks?"

"The same. She knows you."

"She does, and no better woman exists. But, Miss Ashley (I can't give you any other name because I don't know what it would be), this is all too terrible for words. I knew that there was likely to be trouble before you, that the European community would cut you dead, and that in his own home your husband might not prove quite what he seemed in England. But when I pictured to myself your difficulties (as I have often done since we parted), I confess I never thought of anything so bad as this."

Mukti Jan, by way of answer; "I know far better than she does what is good for us all. I tell you once again that, if this woman dies, the sahibs will never rest till she is well avenged."

"Listen to her!" and the beldame laughed out loud. "Who will ever know of it? Who dare come to seek her here? Bought words, every one of them, not worth consideration. Fasten the *kaftan* to her bed."

There was little doubt who was going to be obeyed. Half of the miserable creatures present knew nothing of the world outside the limits of their prison walls, and recognised no authority save that of her who had for years, for the lifetime of some of them, lorded it unquestioned over one and all. Of that great outside power which could bind or free they knew absolutely nothing, except by such vague rumours as were to them as convincing as children's fairy tales. The strong arm of the law, which permeates every nook and cranny of England, was to them something talked of occasionally, but never seen. It never molested them, never violated the sanctity of the zenana, certainly never questioned anything which was done within their prison walls. Did one of them succumb to sickness, or ill-treatment, or neglect, the swathed body was carried forth to burial after an hour or two, undefiled by the prying eyes of a physician, and at the worst it was but another name to be added to the hypothetical lists of those who die every year of cholera, or snake-bite, or the breath of the devil, or any other such swift and convenient end. Not one of them cared a jot for the law. Ignorant, accustomed to ill-usage, and hopeless, they took no account of the

possibility of a better state of things, and now, when Mukti Jan in her anxiety to save Maude Ashley appealed to their fears, the only point on which she believed them to be susceptible to argument, her appeal fell on deaf ears, because the only fear they took heed of was the fear of the wrath of the beldame who was egging them on. And this last, better able than the gossip to gauge her own handiwork, had used a better argument than the woman of the outer world when she appealed to their jealousy, the most womanly characteristic that they ever displayed. Jealousy struck deep into hearts steeled to pity or to fear, and, pushing Mukti Jan aside, they rushed upon their prey.

Swiftly, by the light of the lamp which the old woman held high above them, they bound their unhappy victim's wrists and ankles with whip-cord to the four corners of the bed. Their violence speedily awakened her, but though she moaned at times, she was still too ill, too dazed, to protest against treatment she could not understand. And once she was well secured, four of them raised her, bed and all, and bore her from the room.

As they disappeared through the doorway, Mukti Jan turned to the ayah, who was still wringing her hands in her corner, too scared to speak or act.

"Come, *Jee*," she said coolly, "that ends it. This is no place for you or me. We can do no good here now, and had better get away."

"They will kill her," sobbed the ayah.

"Of course they will. But it is no affair of yours or mine. I did my best, and by this time the Civil-

"I have not told you half what I have suffered. It would take all night to do so. I don't know, Colonel Eustace, why I should trouble you with my sorrows, except that you somehow seem to be a link with the old home that is so far off now. To you, too, I am not ashamed to confess, though it is not yet three months since you warned me in Bombay to—to be careful what I did, that I have come to understand what your thoughts were, that I have come to regret ten thousand times over that I did not, as you advised me, 'rather drown myself then and there' than take such a step."

"Ah, has it come so soon? I do not doubt your sincerity. You are able to see the justice of my warnings already."

"Justice? You did not say half enough. Colonel Eustace, fate has in a way been very kind to me, has done its best to save me from myself. I have never for one instant been wholly at this man's mercy yet. As I told you, we went straight from the church to the train, and when we arrived here I at once became delirious, and was under the doctor's charge forthwith. But none the less I can see from things that have happened what would have been my fate had I fallen wholly unprotected into his hands, surrounded by his countrymen, cut off from my own, and I have made up my mind fully to this, that, come what may, I will never give him the chance."

"What *do* you mean?"

"I will never submit to put myself in his power. I am not joking, nor am I light-headed. I mean every

word that I say, and I tell you that I am going straight home to England at once."

"And what will your husband say to that?"

"Say? Let him say or think just what he likes. His saying or thinking will make no difference to me. He has deceived me grossly—in fact, every word he has told me was a lie, and I consider myself fully absolved from all allegiance to him."

"But how are you going to manage it?"

"How? I shall leave that to you, and that is why I have been waiting till you arrived before I took the necessary steps. If you had delayed much longer I should have acted for myself. There, that is all. Here is my bungalow, and we must say good night. Think over what will be the best thing for me to do, and help me to do it."

"Perhaps you are right, though I should not like to give you an opinion on the spur of the moment. Perhaps the wisest thing you could do would be to escape. Anyway, I will think it over; but remember, Miss Ashley, that it was a simple thing to advise you before. It is much harder now."

"You must try."

"I will, but don't forget that your action is irrevocable. For better, for worse, you have linked your fate to this man's, and nothing can absolve you from the tie but death."

"I can see that you think my ruin is complete," she answered gravely. "Well, I hope it is not, that this is merely a bit of experience that I have bought. Once let me get away, and I hope that there is a future in store for me still. Good night."

It was all very well for her to be so sanguine, but the Colonel was not quite of the same mind. As he drove home, he could not help thinking that his arrival would be but the herald of fresh misfortune if it only encouraged this headstrong girl to some new extravagance. He was a chivalrous man, fully alive to all the difficulties which beset his friend, but even he felt that there was some enterprises which might well give him cause to hesitate.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IT is time that some notice was taken of the views of Mowlah Bux, B.A., who has too long already been left languishing in outer darkness. The position into which this gentleman's affairs were drifting—had drifted, in fact—was the reverse of satisfactory to himself, and the *valkil* was only too conscious of the fact. His scheme had not prospered, and so far the prospect seemed even worse than what had gone before, for he had his private sources of information, and knew more of what was passing than his wife supposed. In point of fact, he was rather more than half inclined to regret his precipitancy in contracting a matrimonial alliance with one of the governing race. He might have said, in the immortal words of an otherwise forgotten Scotch minister (slightly altered to suit his case), "When I married you, all *my* world kenn'd ye had no beauty—your own friends kenn'd I got no siller, and if I did not get an obedient wife I got but a poor bargain." For now that it was all over and done for, this shallow-brained adventurer was becoming painfully alive to the fact that his action had made him no friends but a plentiful crop

of enemies on both sides of the house. And what goaded him to madness was the fact that so far he had got nothing by his motion but a plentiful harvest of troubles. The home life of England, of Europe generally, is a thing which no native takes much trouble to fathom. He knows that Englishwomen enjoy a degree of freedom which, if not actually indecent according to his ideas, is what he would never permit to his own. But custom and training alike disqualify him from forming an opinion regarding a system of treating the gentler sex which is diametrically opposed to that of his own race. And so it was that, until he came to test the matter in his own person, Mowlah Bux had never dreamed of such a state of things as had so very swiftly come to pass.

For, in honest truth, he was fairly caught between double troubles of his own contriving. On the one hand he had his wife in a state of virtual rebellion, in which she was aided and abetted by those of her own race who had not utterly cast her adrift. On the other side was his own tribe of angry relations, egged on by his mother, and his co-religionists, who were furious at his ever having taken up with an Englishwoman, and who lost no opportunity of impressing upon him the necessity for his at once forcing this foreign wife of his to comply with the customs of his race, and to abandon the evil ways so favoured by her own. All the time that his wife lay sick in her bungalow, the time when he was cut off from her society and thrown back among his own people, this process of stiffening our flabby friend had been going on. This was, moreover, the time of the great Mohammedan

feast, when every bigoted zealot is at his fiercest, and when even the most lax feel a quickening of their faith. So that at last he had become primed with the notion that Maude must give way to him, and celebrate the feast by acknowledging, if not the righteousness of his creed, at least the superiority of the customs it enjoined.

The only difficulty was how to do it. Had he not lost his hold over his wife, had even that wretched old mother of his kept out of the way as he bade her do, there might have been some hope. But now Maude was up in arms, supported by the European nurse, and as he more than suspected, protected by the doctor, and it would be no easy matter to bring her again under his complete control.

India is a land of no privacy and of few secrets. The stupid-looking native servant who pretends he knows no English often understands and speaks the language as well as his master. There was such a fellow at the bungalow whose business it was to hang about, learn what he could, and report. The ayah was not above suspicion, but, after all, her interests lay rather with her mistress than with Mowlah Bux, and he was too sharp to try and tamper with her. But Maude, had she known it, was fairly surrounded by spies, who reported to the *vakil* a good deal that was said and some things which were not. But what they did tell—chance expressions of Maude and Mary Bainbridge when talking together, and the frequent visits (more and more spun out) of Dr. Collard—had been quite enough to thoroughly arouse Mowlah Bux's jealousy and alarm.

His repulse by the doctor, whom he hated, had for the moment checked the *vakil's* little scheme. But two days' reflection enabled him to view the matter in a more practical light. Early that Monday morning Mowlah Bux made it his business to wait upon the civil surgeon to hear the verdict promised him two days before.

This was so far a good move that Dr. Collard was a little alarmed by it. It is all very well to say you are going to do a certain thing; it is much harder to carry it into effect. No one knew better than Collard that his patient was practically cured, and that if her husband chose to insist upon seeing her there was no escape. It was all a game of brag (as he knew), and unfortunately Mowlah Bux, by coming like this, had rather carried the war into his territory. Collard feared that he meant to insist.

"Well, Mowlah Bux, and what can I do for you?" he asked when the *vakil* appeared.

"I am come, doctor sahib, to ask when I may again see my wife."

"Ah" (he pretended to think), "well, since you ask me, I can only advise you to leave it alone for the present."

"Why?"

"Because the lady is in a very delicate state of health—has had a bad illness which, though it has left her body, still clings to her mind. She is not well enough as yet."

"She was well enough to go to church yesterday."

"Quite a different thing."

"I cannot understand why. I am her husband, and surely it is my right to see her if I wish?"

"Not if dangerous to her health."

"That I do not think my visit could be."

"And I tell you, as her doctor, that it would."

"Why?"

The doctor was not given to arguing with natives, and it rather angered him to find this man so persistent.

"For many reasons. If you force me to tell you, Mowlah Bux, because your conduct on the last occasion on which she saw you has raised a very strong prejudice against you in her mind."

"That is a foolish thing to say. She has married me, and she must put up with the ways of my people. We do not make such worship of our *zenanis* as you sahibs do."

The doctor would have dearly liked to kick him out of the house, but for Maude's sake he refrained. To help her he must give this brute as much rope as he could.

"And you have married her, don't forget that," he said coolly. "You have married an Englishwoman, and the law won't let you treat her as you do your own countrywomen on the sly."

"A man's domestic matters are his concerns and no one else's. I did not come here to argue matters of religion, but to ask if there were any valid reasons why I should continue not to see my wife."

"And I have told you that, as her professional adviser——"

"Which is valueless. I know the law, doctor sahib."

"Doubtless. It is your trade. But I repeat that I consider that a visit from you would be dangerous to your wife's health. I can say no more."

"Oh, indeed. All that you say makes no matter to me."

"Take care. If she becomes ill again after my warning, all your knowledge of the law won't help you out of the scrape."

"Perhaps not, but that is my affair. It rests with me whether I shall go to see my wife or not. Salaam, doctor sahib."

Collard watched him through the door and out of the compound. The courthouse was near, and the *vakil*, who was evidently bound for it, was proceeding on foot. But the doctor noted that just as he reached the gate, a man, by his dress a kitmutgar, stepped out to meet him. However, that all passed like a flash and he turned back again. He felt uneasy all the day, hardly knowing what was going to happen, and wishing his power to protect poor Maude was as good as his intention undoubtedly was. But he knew how little he could really effect if Mowlah Bux once took the bit between his teeth, and this was what he feared his doing.

The day passed over somehow, but such was his anxiety that he started for his afternoon visit a full half-hour earlier than his wont. He felt immensely relieved when, on inquiring, he was told the memsahib was at home, and invited him to come in.

Maude's appearance further relieved him. The fact was that the girl was, and had been all the day, intensely excited. Colonel Eustace had arrived, and now, as she felt, help was at hand, her own troubles mostly at an end.

"Dear me," he said, as he shook hands with her, "your visit to church has done you good. All that

we want now to make a complete recovery is a little cheerful society."

He stopped in some embarrassment. He was prescribing something which would be very hard to dispense.

"And I hope to get it," she answered, somewhat to his surprise. "Colonel Eustace is here, and now I shall be all right."

"You set great faith on Eustace," he said, a little nettled, perhaps, at having the Colonel always rammed down his throat this way.

"And don't you know why? Because he reminds me of my home where I first knew him. Come, Dr. Collard, I am going to tell you a secret. I don't mean to stay here a moment longer than I need."

"Why?"

"Because I have made up my mind that this life is impossible—would kill me, in fact."

"I think you are very wise to go," he answered gravely. "I should not, under ordinary circumstances, advise any woman to cut herself adrift from her husband, but in your case I know by sad experience that there are but two alternatives."

"But what are they?"

"Flight or death."

"Have you known such a case as mine?"

"Yes and no. So please don't press for more information."

"And the—lady died?"

"Yes, poor soul; and it was the best thing too."

"Well, I don't mean to die, Dr. Collard, if I can help it. You may depend upon that."

Chattel or Wife?

"That is right," he said cheerily, and changed the subject. Then tea was brought, and for a time they chatted, and then the doctor rose to go.

"Must you go so soon, Dr. Collard? I shall be all alone," she said. "Mrs. Bainbridge has been sent for to see her man, as she calls him, who, I fear, is not behaving very well."

"More matrimonial troubles, Mrs. Ashley," he answered, with a smile. "By the way, I saw Mowlah Bux this morning."

The name drove back the smile on Maude Ashley's lips.

"Did you? What did he say?"

"Wanted to see you."

"What did you say?"

"I forbade him."

"And is he going to listen to you?"

"I don't think so. I mentioned it because I wanted to warn you."

"Thank you. Now if he comes I shall be ready for him."

So he bade her good night, got into his trap, and drove away. And Maude Ashley watched him go, standing in the verandah with the bamboo screen in her hand. The trap rolled out of the compound, the sound of the wheels died away in the distance, and she turned to re-enter the room. But she had not reached the tea table before the portière curtain over the door leading to her husband's part of the house was lifted, and Mowlah Bux entered the room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THERE was a look on Mowlah Bux's face such as Maude had never seen there before—a look in which rage, malice, hatred were all combined. For a minute he stood looking at her, and then he came swiftly across the room, and hissed out between his teeth—

“Flight or death.”

Then Maude knew that he must have overheard every word. She was brave enough—had never lacked courage when she was well—but for that brief minute she did wish that the doctor's carriage had not gone quite so far. However, the murder was out now, and Mowlah Bux in possession of the scheme of her devising; so there was nothing for it but to put a bold face on the matter.

“You have been listening,” she said scornfully.

“Yes, and rightly too, judging by what I have heard. No wonder that you did not wish me to come here; no wonder that your doctor friend tried to make me believe that you were too sick for me to visit you. I had heard your countrywomen were so good and virtuous; I find they are no better than their sisters elsewhere in the world.”

"You villain, how dare you?"

"How dare I? I dare do a good deal when you provoke me. Am I not your husband? Have I no rights which you are bound to respect?"

"None whatever. I deny your right altogether. You have from the first lied to me, deceived me in everything that you have said or done, and I cast you off utterly. You would have had to know it some time, and it is just as well you should know it soon as late."

"Deceived you?" he growled. "And what have you done, pray, after tricking me into marrying you?"

"I never did."

"You did; you stole away my senses and made me believe I loved you. I hate you now."

"The feeling is reciprocal."

"But an Indian native gentleman has his feelings just as much as these men you so much prefer. You have dishonoured my name and house, a thing I will not permit."

"How dare you say such things? What have I ever done to disgrace you or your name?" she asked indignantly.

"Much—many things. I was not such a foolish fellow as to trust one of your sex to herself. I know what has been going on here in my absence."

"Nothing that you do not know; certainly nothing that I should not care to be known by all the world."

"Who have you been receiving here in my absence?"

"You wretch, when you know that Mrs. Bainbridge has been with me all the time."

"I would not trust her more than I would you."

"You would not dare to say that if she were here. She made you behave yourself once before, and would again."

The answer was a straight blow between the eyes, and Mowlah Bux, B.A., painfully conscious of its truth, even in his hot wrath knew only too well that he had watched the nurse off the premises before he dared set foot in the bungalow himself.

"And not only here," he continued, pretending to ignore his wife's last remark, "but outside too. Whom did you walk from the church with only last night?"

"I see you have had me well watched, as you boast," she answered haughtily. "But you will get little satisfaction from that. My conscience is quite clear, and all your black spies and your own listening behind curtains will not help you in the least. Stand out of my way. I am going to my own room."

"You are not. I have much to say to you."

"I decline to listen to it," she said. "Just as I decline to have anything more to say to you in any way. You were untruthful to start with. Colonel Eustace said you would deceive me bitterly, but I don't think even he knew what a thorough cur you are."

The name of his supposed rival—of the man so superior in every point to himself—roused the man to madness, for a moment his rage found vent in a string of Hindustani oaths, which, luckily, Maude could not understand. Then he was able to again collect himself and speak to her in a language which conveyed some meaning.

"You are a bad woman," he hissed; "a bad, wicked woman, false to me and to all that is good. Luckily in this land we have means of making such as you feel their misdeeds as I shall do now. The punishment of such as you is as heavy as you deserve."

"You forget I am an Englishwoman and not one of your own unhappy countrywomen about whose sufferings you had so much to say at home."

"And you forget that you are the wife of a native gentleman, one, so to speak, of us."

"Never, as you will find right speedily. I shall appeal for help——"

"To whom?"

"To my own countrymen."

"You mean that Eustace fellow, or that scoundrel of a doctor? Appeal if you like, but I know the law and how careful the sahibs are of interfering in a native gentleman's concerns. You may appeal as often as you like, but it will not avail you much."

For the first time Maude's heart sank within her. She began really to fear that he might be right, that that strange matrimonial law which had such a wide sweep in her own country had its ramifications in India as well. But she managed to conceal her fears, feeling, however, that her courage and the strength of indignation which had so far sustained her were alike ebbing away. Longing for the return of Mrs. Bainbridge, she thought that she would retire to her own room to wait.

"Stand out of the way," she said haughtily.

But Mowlah Bux, B.A., his back up against the door which led into her side of the house, utterly refused to move.

"Stand out of the way," she repeated, with a stamp of her foot.

The other, a fresh scheme in his mind, made no answer, but only eyed her with a cruel grin.

"Very well, there are other ways to the room," she said, and turned to pass into the verandah.

Perhaps this was just what Mowlah Bux was waiting for, since a swift movement on his part warned his wife that he was following on her track. Smitten with sudden fear, dreading that he meant to touch, perhaps to strike her, she quickened her pace to get away. The room was small, the man, in springing (human tiger that he was) upon her, fell short, upsetting the tea-table with a crash, falling amid the débris. But, almost before Maude was through the door, he was on his feet again, shouting out orders in Hindustani, fearful in his turn that his victim might escape. What followed was almost instantaneous, so quick that Maude had no more time than sufficed to cry "Help, help. They are murdering me." For out of the side doors poured some half-dozen men, placed doubtless there ready for some such *coup* by Mowlah Bux, B.A., who, in a trice, had thrown shawls round and over the unhappy woman, muffling her head and stifling her cries for aid. Then in an instant they bore her back into her own room and laid her, gagged and helpless, on her own bed again.

At that hour, and in that lonely part of the cantonment, it was perhaps a mere matter of a hundred to one that her appeal for help did not reach sympathetic ears. But as it chanced it did. One Smithson,

ensign newly arrived from England, and taking his evening ride on a vicious country-bred pony, followed by a tribe of miscellaneous mongrel dogs, heard, with doubting ears, Maude's frantic cries for help. Had they been raised in another language than his own he would doubtless have disregarded them because not properly understood. But cries for aid are unusual anywhere, and there is, moreover, a peculiar ring of pain and terror about the screams of a genuinely hunted human being which, in this case, carried conviction even to Smithson's somewhat jejune mind. An older man's wisdom (call it prudence, if you like) might have sufficed to keep him out of a possible row. Smithson had no such scruples. He rode his pony straight up to the verandah, dogs trotting cheerfully in rear, and there found a solitary native—Mowlah Bux, B.A., to wit.

Now it chanced that he had seen something as well as heard the cries, a vision of a woman—white, he could almost swear—struggling in the arms of sundry coffee-coloured imps. But trees intervened, the light was none too good, and he would have found it difficult to state anything definite on oath.

"What's up?" he asked, with the off-hand manner of his age and class.

Mowlah Bux, B.A., had not foreseen this development—indeed, he was almost too ruffled to think. But a brand-new lie, ready-made for future contingencies, he did manage to deliver pat enough.

"It is a poor lady who is mad," he said. "Sometimes she escapes from our hands, and then she makes us much trouble."

Smithson eyed him doubtfully, and even the sundry mongrels of the terrier class (now seated on the brick wall) cocked their ears as if in derision.

"She said she was being murdered," he remarked.

"Mad people have such delusions," was the ready answer.

"They do," replied Mr. Smithson. What he was thinking was—"I am pretty certain you are lying, you black brute, and if I could prove it I would break every bone in your body," for he was new to the country, and had not yet learned how to treat the natives with due respect.

Then followed a pause, momentous to two people at least, for Mowlah Bux was dreading Mrs. Bainbridge's return, and Maude, bound and gagged, could still hear every word that was said. It ended by the young Englishman's, turning grumblingly away.

"Well, I suppose it is all right," he said. "Sorry to have troubled you unnecessarily, but really you should not keep mad people on your premises, you know, if you don't want them to raise half the town. Good afternoon."

"Good afternoon," replied Mowlah Bux politely, for as the danger showed signs of passing away his spirits began to rise. As for the helpless listener within she heard every word, and heard, too, the pony clattering down towards the gate, with the dogs yapping in rear. Then the chick was lifted, and her husband appeared.

"Now, wretch" (take that as the equivalent of many stronger expressions in his native tongue), "you are beginning to understand that you cannot have things all your own way."

He spoke to the others, and quickly they brought a covered palanquin, and lifted Maude into it. Then they disposed the curtains so that she could neither see nor be seen. Next, four of them lifted the palanquin and carried it outside, jolting her dreadfully, since they were amateurs (cousins, in fact, of Mowlah Bux's, chosen for the job), and so bore Maude away, whither she did not dare to think.

Mowlah Bux only waited to see her off the premises, and then he, too, disappeared by another road, leaving the bungalow in the charge of a single native servant, a reliable creature of his own. All the rest, ayah included, had been previously got out of the way.

So when, perhaps half an hour later, Mrs. Bainbridge returned, she found the whole place silent as the grave. The first thing which frightened her was that Maude was nowhere to be found. It was only after some shouting that the chowkidar or watchman, the fellow left in charge by Mowlah Bux, appeared.

"Where is the memsahib?"

"Gone away."

"Gone away? Where to? Where is the ayah?"

"Ayah has gone too."

Then Mary Bainbridge saw that something was very far amiss.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE shadows were lengthening out almost as far as it was possible for them to go before the final eclipse, as Maude's four awkward bearers carried her anyhow out of the compound. For Mowlah Bux, more concerned for the family honour (like the old lady who valued it before the loss of her immortal soul) than for his victim's comfort, had, as stated, enlisted the services of four of his own brethren, who, whatever their shortcomings in the matter of carrying a palanquin, might at all events be trusted not to betray his plot. So poor Maude, already undergoing pangs of suffocation, only short of hanging itself, had to submit to the additional agony of having her poor body rattled along after the manner of one tossed in a blanket. But worse far than the mere bodily discomfort was the mental agony to which she was a prey. Mowlah Bux himself in the old London days, when he was so full of enthusiasm for the regeneration of his countrywomen, had told her more than (in view of present doings) had been quite prudent regarding zenana discipline. And as she was being hurried along, whither she hardly dared think, poor Maude

was filled with apprehensions for her own probable treatment at the hands of these cruel savages in whose power she was. Eustace had once told her that Khurruckpore was one of the most fanatical, as it was one of the largest, cities in the country, and she did not dare to picture to herself what might be her fate before her English friends were able to trace her in the vast labyrinth into which her enemies were sure to take her.

After a time which seemed to her excited imagination interminable, but which, in reality, was less than half an hour, by which time her awkward bearers had with difficulty carried her rather more than a mile, the palanquin was dropped on the ground with a bang, and after a short whispered colloquy, in which she fancied she could distinguish a woman's voice taking part, there came the sound of departing feet. A few minutes later the palanquin was silently lifted, and the journey resumed, this time with a smoothness which was a decided contrast to what had gone before. What had happened had been that at a given secluded spot the amateurs had left their burden in charge of an old woman who was there waiting for them, and who, as soon as they were safely out of sight, had summoned some proper *kahars* who were waiting in readiness to carry the palanquin to its journey's end.

It has been stated that, though Maude could not cry out or breathe with comfort, she was able to hear fairly well. She noted that for some little time they travelled over a road, with few passers-by, but presently the sounds going on all around her left little doubt in her

mind that she was passing through a crowded bazaar. Then came another spell of travelling by less frequented ways, and finally a sound as of the unbarring of a gate. Then she was quietly set down, to be picked up again after a short interval, and carried, with all the unpleasant joltings of the first portion of her journey, to some place where the air felt stifling after the comparative cool outside.

Her heart sank as she recognised that she must in all probability be in some sort of prison-house in the midst of the crowded city. There is an old saying that London is the safest hiding-place in the world, but what advantage London has in point of size over such human hives as Khurruckpore was, as she knew, more than compensated by the labyrinth-like nature of the last-named city, and by the comparative inefficiency of the Indian police, as well as by the sanctity with which the English law surrounds the zenanas of its native inhabitants. She knew enough about what went on within the dark walls of these dwellings to know that they enjoy a practical immunity from police supervision and that she might fear the worst.

However, her captors did not keep her very long in suspense. The pole on which the palanquin was carried was drawn out and the top with its side curtains lifted clear away. Then sundry native women (in itself an omen of coming trouble) raised her and carried her through several doorways to an innermost chamber of all, in which they finally laid her out on a bed.

Then they too retired and left her all alone in the

darkness, for by this time the sun had set, and the small window high up in the roof, which lighted the room by day, did not help much at night. Several minutes elapsed before the curtain which hung over the doorway was again lifted, this time to admit an old native woman bearing a tiny native lamp, a mere saucer of oil in which floated a cotton wick, smelling most unpleasantly as it burned. By the feeble light thus afforded Maude saw in the new arrival the confirmation of all her fears. The crone was none other than Mowlah Bux's mother herself, the same old native woman she had seen at the bungalow a fortnight before.

And now for the first time she saw what a strong family likeness there was between mother and son. Nor was the fancied similarity lessened by the malignant scowl which was oftenest the expression of both their faces. For a moment or so the old hag stood eyeing her victim with a look in which hatred and satisfaction were combined. Then she stepped forward and loosened Maude's bonds.

The girl was so cramped by being held so long in one position that she could not for the moment make any effort even to sit up. Seeing this, the crone stepped quietly to the door, and called to some one outside.

The call was answered by Maude's own ayah. The appearance of this woman brought to the girl the first gleam of hope that she had experienced as yet. She began to think that perhaps Mowlah Bux's malignity had limits after all. But, as a matter of fact, the presence of the ayah was due to sheer necessity. The

crone who was to be Maude's gaoler spoke not one word of English and the prisoner knew no Hindustani, so, when the question of providing an interpreter arose, they decided it would be best to bring Maude's own servant—who, while making herself useful in that particular respect, would at the same time serve to help to break the fall from European to native life. They both knew that Maude was still far from well, so they introduced this woman to look after her bodily comfort till such time as Maude could (save the mark!) take her proper share of the household work.

And herein Mowlah Bux made his first mistake. He had naturally supposed that the ayah, being a co-religionist of his own, would serve his interests in preference to those of his unfortunate wife, forgetting that women of her class value money before anything in the way of principles, and that it was long odds that the ayah would take his money cheerfully, and then sell him without compunction to the other side. Still, as he could not be at home all day, he would have found it hard to make any other arrangement than this.

"Is she ill?" demanded the crone, as the ayah entered the room.

The servant opined that she was, and hastened to her side to loosen her dress and to fan her face. Indeed, Maude showed every sign of fainting. What she had just gone through, even without the closeness of the room and the shock of finding herself a prisoner in her enemy's hands, was quite enough to account for the collapse.

The ayah fanned her and asked for water, which was brought in a common native *chatti*. The hast.

with which the plot had been contrived and carried through had prevented any attention to details, or perhaps even an angry Mowlah Bux would have taken the trouble to see that his unfortunate English wife was provided with articles which, although unknown in his mother's house, were necessities in any cottage in Europe. But there was water which served its purpose, and presently Maude opened her eyes and sat up.

"What is this place, ayah?" she asked feebly.

"This is that Mowlah Bux's house, memsahib."

"Why have they brought me here?"

But the ayah either did not know or would not tell. In any case, there was no time to answer, for the crone, seeing that her prisoner was now capable of attending to what was said, was eager, by means of the menial, to throw in some remarks on her own account.

"Is she better?" she asked. "Then tell her where she is."

The ayah did so.

"Tell her that my son has brought her to the house of his father and mother, which is the proper place for his wife to be."

Again the ayah complied.

"Say that he has done so by the advice of me, his mother, and of his friends, and that she will have to stay here."

But still, to the crone's annoyance, Maude vouchsafed no answer.

"Tell her further," she said, "that if I find she is docile and obedient, and behaves herself as one of us, I will be kind to her. But she must become one of us and give up all idea of going back to her own

people. Ask her," she added, for she was growing impatient as she saw that Maude listened quietly to sentence after sentence as it was translated, but made no sign of answering, "what she means to do?"

When this question was put to her, the victim hesitated a moment before she made reply.

"Say," she said presently, "that I do not mean to stay in any place to which I have been brought by violence and against my will."

But the ayah was wiser than her mistress. What she did say was, "She is very unhappy and does not like this place."

"Has she not made me and others unhappy too by her infamous bewitching of my son?" flashed out the old woman fiercely. "Let her behave or look to it. This place is strong and well concealed, and it will be long ere her sahib friends come here to look for her, nor can she escape of her own accord. Now she is warned. We are in no temper to have fresh dishonour put upon our family by such as she is."

Which speech, also, the ayah did not see fit to translate as it stood, keeping the information to herself for her own future guidance, so that in the event the threats, much more terrifying to her knowledge than to Maude's ignorance, bore fruit.

Having said her say, and seen that all was secure, the hag took her leave, and directly the others were alone Maude commenced her appeal to the ayah.

"You must help me to escape from this place at once, ayah," she began.

"Memsahib, don't think of it, don't, indeed," cried the woman, clasping her mistress's hands in both her own. "To do so would mean death for you and

for me. You don't know these people. You have wronged their *izzat*—their honour—as they think, and rather than you should do so again they would kill both you and me.”

“Nonsense,” retorted Maude, to whose English ideas the threat seemed absurd. “They dare not do such a thing for their own sakes. Open the door.”

“No, no; don't dream of such a thing. This is a big house full of people, and Bungi *mehter* told me all about it long ago. It is Sheikh Beiram's house this, once a very strong place, and the dwelling of a great lord of Khurruckpore. From these women's quarters there is no escape, and you must not try. The house is full of all Mowlah Bux's brethren, and when we got outside the door they would bind us, and bring us back. Besides, memsahib, you must not think of such things now, when the whole city is in an uproar with the feast, and men's minds are full of violence.”

“But, you silly creature, do you suppose I shall not be missed, or that my friends will not come to seek for me?”

“Then wait, memsahib, till such time as they do. But speak low, lest any overhear us, just as that Mowlah Bux used always to be listening behind the curtain of your room in the bungalow.”

Maude had suffered too recently from this very practice to disregard the advice. But her mind was full of terror for her situation, since now she had lost the protection of Mary Bainbridge, which had hitherto kept her safe from her husband's violence. Yet she knew that she could only hope and wait on events, trusting to a speedy rescue by her friends. Poor

girl—she little knew her husband's craft, or what he was doing at this very time. Yet when, some hours later, he paid her a visit, it did strike her that there was a look of triumph on his crafty face, the cause of which she supposed to be his satisfaction at having her at his mercy again. Very little passed between them, but that little was to the point.

"I have come to tell you," he said, "that you will have now to do as I wish, and not as you may propose. You are in my house, and under my mother's orders, who will teach you how the wife of a native gentleman should behave. If you are sensible, you will accept the situation; if you are not, so much the worse for you."

"I am quite aware that I am your prisoner," she answered, "but that does not alter my resolution in the least. I will never be your wife except in name."

"We shall see," was his answer; "in a week's time you may be of another mind."

With which he took his leave, and presently one of the women brought her something to eat. It was not very much—only tea, bread, butter, and fruit, served on some common English crockery just bought in the bazaar. But, poor as it was, it was none the less a sort of satisfaction to her to have an English meal—something to remind her of the home from which she was cut off—something that did not recall to her the fact that she was so utterly surrounded by natives, and natives alone.

CHAPTER XXVI

THERE is, when spoken in Hindustani, very little difference in the sound of the two words which respectively express "run away" and "gone out for a walk." Mrs. Bainbridge's knowledge of the vernacular was not extensive, and the result was that when the chowkidar tried to convey to her the former meaning, it was the latter which the worthy woman understood.

"Gone out? Where?"

"Not gone out at all, memsahib; she has run away."

"What do you mean? What should she run away for?"

"Heaven knows" (with a shrug of the shoulders).

"I only know she has gone."

"Nonsense," with which Mrs. Bainbridge pushed past him to search the house. But only to find no one there, nor anything ostensibly amiss except the overturned tea-table in the sitting-room. Nothing else had been moved, not even Maude's outdoor cloak and hat, which hung in their accustomed place. But a close inspection of the bed revealed the fact that some one had been lying down and seemed to have got up in a hurry.

This very absence of evidence was in itself disquieting. Mrs. Bainbridge felt certain that Maude would never have taken such a decisive step without consulting her, so she sat down in the chair her patient generally used and tried to think it all out. She had not been sitting there very long before she heard some one moving about in the verandah, and on running out to see who it might be, plumped right into the arms of Mowlah Bux himself.

"Where's your wife?" she asked.

"I was just coming in to ask you the same question," he answered coolly. "She was in your charge when I saw her last. Where is she now?"

"Don't try any of your tricks with me, you brown blackguard," retorted Mary Bainbridge indignantly, "If she has gone away, you know well enough where she is to be found. If you don't tell me this instant, I shall go to the police."

"I am going to the police myself," he replied, "directly that I am satisfied that she is not here. I know no more than yourself where she is."

"Look at the bed, look at it."

"Well? I see nothing."

"It's all tumbled."

"Well, my wife often lay down there."

"And the tea-table in the next room."

Then Mowlah Bux looked for a moment confused. He had forgotten the scuffle and its result. But he tried to brazen it out.

"What tea-table?" he asked.

"It's all upset."

"Is it? I never noticed it. Let me see it."

"How did you know your wife had gone if you had not looked for her?" asked Mrs. Bainbridge suspiciously.

"I had heard it from Ram Deen here, the chowkidar."

"And you never looked to see if he was telling the truth?"

"I looked in here and shouted. Then I went to see whether she had taken the phittun gharry she always used. She has not."

"Then where can she be?" asked the good woman helplessly, as she sank into a chair.

"That," said Mowlah Bux, who thought she had come to the end of her objections, "you should know better than me. You have been here all along, and should know what has been going on here."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, all those visits from that doctor fellow, and the other scoundrel of——"

"Take care, Mowlah Bux, or I'll repeat what you say. I always knew you for a blackguard, but that poor girl you tricked into marrying you is one of a different sort. I don't expect you to understand the ways of a self-respecting Englishwoman, but I do think you might keep your ugly thoughts to yourself. There is no better woman in the world than your wife, and few men as good as the two you would speak ill of."

"That's all very well, but I've no doubt that you are well paid to hold your tongue and look the other way."

"Heaven keep me peaceable, or I'll have to lay

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"That's all very well, but I've no doubt that you are well paid to hold your tongue and look the other way."

"Heaven keep me peaceable, or I'll have to lay

hands on you yet, Mowlah Bux. If you had been a decent Englishman instead of a dirty brown heathen, you'd have had something to remember by this for saying what you have. I guessed you were lying to me before; I am sure of it now. You've done something to that poor girl, I'd swear to it, and before I've done with you I'll ferret out the truth."

"Where are you going?"

"Mind your own business, and let me mind mine."

"I thought, perhaps, you were going to the police. If so, I'll come too."

"Go your ways. You'll never go near the police; they know too much of you." With which parting shot she flounced from the room.

A quarter of an hour later Mrs. Bainbridge, very hot and out of breath, made her appearance in the verandah of Dr. Collard's bungalow, where the civil surgeon was sitting in a peg chair, and regaling himself with a whisky and soda and a cheroot.

"Doctor, she's gone," she blurted out, as soon as she came within earshot.

"Who?"

"Mrs. Ashley."

"The deuce she has? I did not expect it so soon. Did you see her off?"

"See her off? Is the man daft? How should I see her off?"

"I thought you knew she meant to leave Khur-ruckpore. You were in her confidence, were you not?"

"Yes, but nothing of this. When I got back from the barracks—where I had been having a word with

Bainbridge, who has broken the pledge again, worse luck to it—I found not a soul at the bungalow except the chowkidar. While I was trying to see what had happened, her husband came in, and pretended that he did not know either—which I take leave to doubt.”

“Why?”

“Well, to begin with, she had taken nothing, not even a handbag, that I could see. Secondly, the tea-table was all upset——”

“But, my good woman, I was with her myself up to nearly five o’clock, and then she never hinted at any such thing as going away.”

“All the worse. It can’t have been much after six when I got there first.”

Then the doctor ordered out his trap.

“This needs looking into,” he said.

“Where are you going?”

“We’re both going to see Colonel Eustace. He is a friend of Mrs. Ashley, and if any one knows anything, he will.”

But when they found the Colonel, who had just come home to dress for dinner, he knew nothing at all.

“Of course I cannot be certain that Miss Ashley would not act without consulting me,” he said, and his face was very grave, “but I think it to the last degree improbable. Who is your district superintendent of police here, Collard?”

“Hewett, a first-rate man. There’s no better in the province.”

“I’ll just get hold of Fairfax, ask him to make my excuses, and then I will come with you. We had better see him at once.”

"Mrs. Bainbridge is with me."

"Ah! She was the nurse, was she not? Well, we don't want her. This is rather a delicate matter, and we shall be better without a woman in it. I'll be with you in a minute, and meanwhile do you get rid of her."

He was back almost before Collard had done explaining to the honest woman that there was only room in the trap for two, so would she mind going home in a cab? She said she would just as soon walk, and had hardly got down before Eustace arrived on the scene. One of the little traits which made him such a favourite in the world was the fact that he always had a kind word for everybody he met.

"Ah, Mrs. Bainbridge," he said as he shook hands with her, "so your patient has run away? I wonder at that if you still take such good care of people as you did of me. Well, we must try and get her back."

"I do hope you will find her, Colonel."

"I hope so too. She is an old friend of mine, you know. By the way, Mrs. Bainbridge," as he lit a cheroot, "I'd not say too much in barracks, if I were you. The more we work in the dark the better chance we shall have of getting at the truth, especially if we have to fight these natives."

"You think that Mowlah Bux has a finger in the pie, Colonel?"

"Of course I cannot say for certain, but it looks like it. Well, good night, Mrs. Bainbridge, we ought to lose no more time."

"Do you really think the husband has had any to do with this?" asked Collard, as they drove away.

"It looks very much as if he had spirited her away."

"I hope not. I have not seen much of him, but I confess I have always had a sort of feeling that he was a most unmitigated scoundrel, capable of any villany. And what's more, my assistant, Rahim Khan, thinks the same, though he does not say so."

"I never liked the fellow myself, though I first saw him under the most favourable circumstances possible, at home. But I always mistrust these natives who swallow our English notions whole, without trying to digest them."

"In that you are not singular. You'd find the same idea among all but a few faddist Europeans, and it is nowhere, I fancy, stronger than among the wiser of their own people. However, are not we straying from the business?"

"We are, and are not likely to get on the track again unless Hewett can help us. Do you know, I can hardly realise what has happened as yet. It is so unexpected."

Mr. Hewett was just sitting down to dinner when they were announced, but he came to them at once.

"Well, gentlemen, what can I do for you?" he asked.

"Let me introduce Colonel Eustace, our new A.A.G.," said the doctor. "We have come to ask your assistance, Hewett, in a very mysterious affair. A lady has disappeared from the station."

"Do you mean Mowlah Bux, *vakil's* English wife?" asked the other, with a smile.

"Yes," replied Collard, surprised at the unexpected answer.

"Well, what do you want?"

"Eustace, here, is her oldest friend in the place, and I have been attending her professionally. This afternoon she vanished, and we want to know where she has gone."

"This is curious," said the policeman, his smile growing broader as he spoke. "May I ask, do you suggest foul play?"

"Not quite that, but we fear she may have been spirited away."

"Have you any suggestion to make as to who is the culprit?"

"Eustace thinks it is Mowlah Bux himself."

The other laughed outright.

"Excuse my seeming levity, gentlemen," he said, "but it may interest you to know that this very Mowlah Bux was in this room, not ten minutes since, for the purpose of lodging a precisely similar complaint against you two!"

"The scoundrel!" cried Eustace, "what will he say next?"

"Certainly, your coming here puts a deeper significance on what has happened. You will forgive me, Colonel Eustace, when I tell you that, not having the pleasure of your acquaintance, I was at first inclined to credit what Mowlah Bux said."

"Much obliged to you," said Eustace, with a short laugh.

"I need scarcely add that I should not have mentioned the fact, if your own appearance here had not put an entirely different complexion on

the business. Now, another question. Have you dined—either of you?”

“No,” said Collard, “our anxiety brought us here instead.”

“Then join me here, if you will excuse shortcomings, as my wife is away. We can discuss this matter afterwards over a cheroot.”

Which proposal, feeling that their own chance of a meal elsewhere was getting shadowy, and that they ought not to keep the Police-Captain-Sahib from his dinner, they were glad to accept.

Three-quarters of an hour later they were sitting over their coffee out in the garden, under a punkah pulled by a deaf coolie—a particularly useful servant to a man who had often delicate affairs to discuss. No other of the domestics was allowed to come near them, and, being thus secured from prying ears, Hewett introduced the subject foremost in all their thoughts. He asked the doctor to give a succinct account of all that he knew of Maude Ashley, and the strange establishment in the bungalow in the civil lines. And the more he heard, the graver grew his face.

“I think Colonel Eustace is right,” he said at last, “and that Mowlah Bux has spirited her away.”

The Colonel groaned aloud. All of them knew what this meant, but he, perhaps, cherished warmer feelings for the unfortunate girl than either of the others. It was the doctor who spoke next.

“Now, Hewett,” he said, “it is your turn to stand fire. Tell us what you make of it all. What follows if he has done so?”

"I hardly like to think, much less to say. I need hardly tell either of you two that, on a point like this, it is very hard to see one's way. One thing is certain, and that is that, in a matter affecting their women-kind, Mowlah Bux & Co. won't stick at trifles."

"But," urged the Colonel, "Miss Ashley is an Englishwoman."

"*Civis Romanus*, in fact," replied the other. "Well, that will not help her much since she has thrown in her lot with the natives. I never had such a case before, and I am a trifle nonplussed."

"Is she in actual danger, do you think?" asked Collard.

"Yes, without question, if the man is the jealous brute you think."

"Then, why not get a search-warrant and find her?" asked Eustace.

"My dear Colonel, we are not in London. A sworn information by you as her nearest friend may do much there, but what can we do in Khurruckpore? Besides, as Mowlah Bux has doubtless calculated, this is no time for us to interfere. To-night the *Eed* begins."

"I forgot that."

"Yes; and that is the point on which it all turns. It will take us all our time to keep the peace as it is, without provoking a riot by meddling in the zenana concerns of a man like your friend the *vakil*. That would be a delicate matter at any time; absolutely impossible when all the fanaticism in the town is only just half a degree below boiling-over point."

"My God! it is awful."

"It is. But it is not your fault or mine. This lady has of her own accord thrust herself into a situation where we cannot help her. It is just like the missionaries in savage countries. They go where they are bound to be eaten, and, when they *are* eaten, their friends expect the whole force of the British nation to avenge their death. Beautiful in theory, but bad in practice. Our only chance would have been to nip this precious marriage in the bud."

"I tried to do so—I said everything I could think of, but she was both blind and deaf," said Eustace. "She had laid down a career for herself, and meant to try it, never seeing the impossibilities of the thing she was attempting."

"Wherein she only resembled the ways of her sex, who are, as a rule, obstinate to a fault and too self-confident to listen to reason."

"But look here, Hewett, the matter can't rest here. What are you going to do?" inquired Collard.

"What *can* I do? I can inquire as I have already promised Mowlah Bux to do. But my police have their hands full just now, and at best they are full clumsy for such a delicate job. I'll do my best for you, but I warn you, till the feast is over there is practically nothing to be done."

And both the others knew that he was right. Maude Ashley might be an Englishwoman, but she was also Mrs. Mowlah Bux. Hewett was quite right. They had only suspicion to work on as yet, and none of the magistrates would be likely to sanction any course of action calculated to further inflame the already too-

inflammable passions of these Mussulman fanatics at such a dangerous time.

So there they sat in apparent careless ease, Collard and the police officer quietly chatting on current topics, Eustace eating out his heart in helpless despair. To his quick imagination the tragedy was already accomplished—Maude punished according to the laws of her husband's creed. And the only consolation was the possible punishment at some future time of Mowlah Bux's evil deeds.

Even at its best the matter had a terribly serious side, and this was the one to which he drew Collard's attention when, an hour later, the doctor was driving him home.

"Not much comfort there, Colonel?" quoth the medico, as they drove away from the policeman's bungalow.

"None," said the Colonel, "not a scrap."

"I hope the poor woman will come through it all right."

"She cannot do that," was the answer.

"Why not?"

"For a very simple reason. Don't you see that her object all through has been to escape unharmed? Up to this last business she had kept that damned husband of hers at bay, had seen her mistake, and determined that the marriage ceremony should be the beginning and end of their married life. Now she cannot do that. He has her in his power, and he will make the most of his chance of breaking her spirit, and if she do escape, of leaving behind the memory of the unutterable baseness of the life his wife has had to lead."

“True. I never thought of that.”

“Yet that is where the trouble lies, and that is what he knew when he carried her off. She has had her eyes opened in time; his object is to make the discovery valueless; to try and render her such a poor broken drudge that she will never again be fit to face you and me.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

TIMES of religious festival in India have a knack of coming in like their monsoon—stormily, especially when (as has happened frequently of late years) the principal feasts of the two great sects which divide Upper India fall about the same time. History teaches us that religious strife far transcends in virulence mere political rivalry, and the great religious cleavage of India is an ever-present source of anxiety to the officials responsible for maintaining the peace. For if there is one thing above another on which a native of India prides himself it is his *izzat*, roughly translated, as a rule, “honour,” though, as a matter of fact, some such clumsy phrase as “his position in the consideration of other people” would be nearer the mark. When they are celebrating their own festivals Mohammedan and Hindu are apt to be carried away by their inflamed religious zeal, and to show little consideration for the feelings of the rival sect, with the result that retaliation is swift to follow, and as often as not a riot ensues. Small wonder that at such times the anxieties of the officials are great, that the Deputy Commissioner looks grave, and th

senior police officer is ever on the move. They both know that they cannot see the end of what is just beginning, and that the gaudy procession which is just starting may be the signal for a riot which will end in bloodshed, and only be stopped by the intervention of armed troops.

There was every sign in this particular year in Khurruckpore that the trouble was going to end in something more than smoke, and the matter loomed heavily before the eyes of the officials, pregnant with unexpected consequences to at least one individual in the community. Mowlah Bux's marriage had not pleased his kinsmen—mixed marriages seldom do—but they were at one with him in thinking that he ought to exercise a husband's rights over his Christian wife; nay, more than that, they had determined that, in order to purge himself of the taint of apostacy, and make the marriage binding under their own law, the pair should be married over again under the Mohammedan rites, and if possible, the new-made wife should become a True Believer of her husband's faith.

Such a matter was simple enough in their eyes. A Mussulman has no inexorable caste laws to draw a barrier which has power to prevent any man or woman not born into the faith from ever becoming an orthodox Hindu. Mahomet was the giant proselytiser of his or any other age, and his followers carry on his behests to this day. Well might Mr. Hewett say that any interference at this juncture, when militant Mohammedanism had the upper hand and meant to keep it, was impossible. The mysterious current which the European officials had seen centring

round a section of the Mussulman community had its centre in the old house of Sheikh Beiram, where the fanatics of the town were rallying round the kinsmen of Mowlah Bux, intent on carrying this marriage through.

When John Hewett set to work to make his inquiries, his first step was to send down to the city his most trusted native inspector, one Beera Singh, a staunch, clear-headed Sikh, whom he knew to be capable of ferreting out most of what there was to learn. But Beera Singh on this occasion did not meet with much success. The chowkidar at Mowlah Bux's bungalow (well bribed to silence) knew nothing, and the rest of the ill-fated establishment had vanished, to mingle once again as scattered items in the teeming Indian hordes, and to find them at short notice was like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay. So Beera Singh reported to his chief, who forwarded the intelligence to Colonel Eustace, adding, on his own account, that for the moment his hands were too full to follow up the scanty clues. Khurruckpore was a mass of seething religious unrest, and needed close watching lest it burst into an ugly conflagration, hard to quench.

This was no news to Eustace, who had already his hands full owing to the senior magistrate of the place having asked the General to hold the troops in readiness in case of need. In such cases the arrangements fell to the chief staff officer of the place.

Collard was worse off still, for Rahim Khan, orthodox Mussulman that he was, was busy with the feast, and the doctor himself had had, single-

handed, to cope with a sharp outbreak of cholera in an unsavoury *busti* near the city, which needed to be checked before it had time to spread. In fact, every soul who might have helped poor Maude was virtually *hors de combat*, with, however, one notable exception. We were near forgetting the worthy nurse.

Mrs. Bainbridge, when she was left standing that evening outside Major Fairfax's bungalow, had to consider what she ought to do next on her own account. Clearly the first thing was to run home and let Bainbridge know of her unexpected return to the family circle and the resumption of her personal supervision of his erratic ways. This done, she was free for the rest of the evening, for her "man" was on guard, safe from temptation till relieved the following morning. Her mind was soon made up. She would just step across to Mowlah Bux's bungalow, and remove such of her belongings as had found their way there during the last six weeks.

Moreover, being a woman at once active, thrifty, and inured to the climate, she did not dream of wasting her money by taking a cab, as perhaps others might have done after a hard day's work, complicated by no little tramping to and fro. The distance was not much more than a mile, the bundle was not large, so how could it travel better than on the head of her own familiar imp? Forthwith she stepped into the verandah at the back of the quarter appropriated for her own special use, and shouted for "Gassy" as loud as she could.

The third or fourth summons had the desired effect, and there came tumbling towards her from the

outbuildings in rear a young native cook-boy of decidedly unsavoury outward appearance—filthily dirty, in fact—clad in a minimum of garments, which had once been white, but were now sadly soiled and worn. This individual, who rejoiced in the high-sounding title of “Ghazi,” or the Victorious, was Mrs. Bainbridge’s domestic help, one of those thieving, lying, dirty, but always clever, and (so long as there is any one by to drive them) active natives whom the soldier’s better-half generally manages to pick up as a servant—useful to the last degree, but untrustworthy in proportion (because they are not well enough paid to ensure their honesty), none too high-class as servants go, and certainly never clean. Mrs. Bainbridge explained her errand and set out, with the imp trotting along a respectful distance in rear. And in this order “some half-hour later they reached the deserted bungalow (speed was out of the question to one of Mrs. B.’s deliberate habits), and hailed the chowkidar.

Not only did that functionary take some calling, but when at length he did make his appearance he seemed sadly disconcerted by their arrival. Nay, more, he actually was inclined to dispute their entry to the house, though when the lady insisted on her right to fetch her property he gave way, after a perfect volley of abuse hurled at his devoted head by Ghazi, who was a past-master of the art of slanging his neighbours.

There was evidently a reason for his delay. The room lately occupied by Maude was in a fine state of confusion, littered, in fact, with rugs, boxes, &c.,

while on the bed, beside which stood open the largest of her travelling trunks, were sundry articles of wearing apparel, into which it was obvious that someone was in the very act of heaping them when Mrs. Bainbridge's arrival suspended operations for the time.

That good woman, on viewing this unexpected sight, plumped herself down on the bed, and merely ejaculating, "Well, I never," stared first at the ruin and then at the chowkidar, who was only too obviously ill at ease, and anxious for her, according to agreement, to take her own and be gone.

There was, however, another unseen spectator near at hand. Behind the half-open door which led into the sitting-room, well hidden by the curtain, was the master of the house, who was listening to hear what was going forward, and heartily cursing the chowkidar's stupidity and Mrs. Bainbridge's persistence all the time. Thinking that everybody else was clear of the premises, he had returned in order to pack up his wife's belongings as a preliminary to placing them in charge of the watchman under lock and key. Now, Mowlah Bux cared nothing for the two men whom he knew that he would have against him in this business; he could trust to his own wit to deal with them. But of Mary Bainbridge he was desperately afraid. He was keenly alive to the old woman's craft and persistency, and here at the first start he was confronted by her, like a true old sleuth-hound, right on the track, and the cowardly wretch trembled at the thought. But she was speaking, and he must listen to what she said.

"Chowkidar, what's all this bobbery about?"

The fellow, alarmed on his own account and anxious not to commit himself, took refuge in deceit, and pretended he did not understand English. So she tried him with her best Hindustani, with no better effect, and lastly she set Ghazi on to talk to him, whereupon the man found his tongue.

"It was just as the memsahib had left them," he said.

"That's an untruth anyway, as you can tell him, Gassy, as soon as you like. I was in the room not two hours since, after she had left anyway, and there was none of this. Just ask him what he has to say to that."

Apparently the chowkidar had nothing to say, for he adhered to his original statement, throwing in this time for Ghazi's especial behoof sundry complimentary remarks (fortunately not understood) regarding Mrs. Bainbridge herself. The old lady grew wrathful at this continued evasion.

"Tell the brown thief that he was stealing them, if I had not come in to stop him. Tell him that from me, Gassy. And say, too, that he can fetch his master, for not one step will I budge from here till I am sure that the poor child's things are as safe as I can make them."

Before the chowkidar had time to frame a reply, the curtain was lifted and Mowlah Bux stepped into the room.

"May I ask what you are doing here?" he said.

"I came to fetch my own things, and pretty goings-on I find here."

"All by my orders. I am putting these things away in safety till I get some news."

"I'm glad to hear it. I thought it was that thief of a chowkidar there."

"He is no thief, but a very honest man whom I have known these many years. I might more justly suspect the reason of your coming here unasked."

"You black blackguard, do you take me for a thief?"

"My experience of your countrywomen is not good."

"Nor mine of you. That box" (pointing to it) "is mine, and I'll just unpack it to show there's nothing in it that is not my own. I've nothing in it belonging to the poor child—Heaven be good to her wherever she is."

"I believe you," said Mowlah Bux, who only wanted her gone.

"Thank you, Mr. Mowlah Bux, but I'm an honest woman myself, and I am not going to have you saying hereafter that I took what was not mine. You stand by while I show you what's in it."

It was a tedious job, somewhat prolonged by the good woman's care of her property, but it was finished at last, much to the man's relief.

"Now you can go," he said.

"Small thanks to you. Good night. I doubt you could tell me something if you wanted to. But, never fear, I'll find you out yet."

With which parting shot she took her leave, followed by Ghazi with the box scientifically balanced on his head.

Half-way home a sudden thought struck her, and she stopped where she stood.

"Gassy," she asked, "did you know any of the servants at that bungalow?"

"Memsahib, that Buddhoo *mehter* is my brother."

"Is he? Where is he now?"

"Gone."

"Where to?"

"I had not time to ask, memsahib."

"Could you find out?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then do so, and when you get him, don't quit hold of him till you bring him to me."

"He very drunken fellow, that Buddhoo, memsahib," said Ghazi, who had his own failings in that respect. "You give me one bottle of canteen rum, I tell him he come quick."

Mrs. Bainbridge was too sharp for that. She did not want her "attendant staggering in at cock-crow with his turban awry, and himself unable to stand.

"Not now, Gassy, but when he comes. Off you go," she said.

And as he shot off to earn the promised reward, she herself stepped across to make interest with the canteen sergeant's wife to get it. She seldom in her regiment had to ask a favour in vain. But the bait for the trap was laid long before her messenger returned with news.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

OF all the doubts and difficulties which beset Maude in her new trouble, the one that gave her most concern was the question of how she was to safeguard herself from Mowlah Bux. For, although she could still only imperfectly understand his action, she knew that it was proof positive of his desire for the future to separate her from her own kith and kin, to deprive her, as far as possible, of her European birthright, and to transform her into what he was pleased to term "a native gentleman's wife."

First, she made the ayah promise to remain in the room all night, which the woman consented to do. Next, she looked for some means of barricading the door, but this she found to be impossible, as it was only a rough native arrangement which opened outwards, and could only be fastened on that side. This was so uncomfortable that her first idea was to sit up all night—a plan which she was speedily forced to abandon by an increasing sense of drowsiness, which at length became so powerful that she had no option but to take off her outer dress—the tea-gown she had been wearing when she was seized by her

husband's myrmidons—and make herself as comfortable as she could on the native bed which formed the only furniture of the room. She came to the conclusion afterwards that she must have been drugged, for, when she awoke on the following morning, the sun was high in the heavens. What was more terrifying was that she was alone, but, on her calling for the ayah, the woman at once appeared from behind the curtain which hung before the door.

"Where have you been? Have you been away long?" she asked.

"Oh no, memsahib, I just gone this minute."

"What time is it?"

"I not know. Perhaps some nine o'clock."

"Well, get me some water to wash my face and hands."

"It is ready, memsahib."

So it was, but in a native dish. Nothing English appeared except the tea things in which her breakfast was presently brought to her. But, before that, she had had a worse shock than ever. On asking for her tea-gown, it was not forthcoming.

"Where is it? Who has dared to take it away?" she demanded indignantly of the ayah.

"That Mowlah Bux's mama take it after the memsahib gone sleeping," was the reply. "She say this one Hindustani woman now, not wearing such those English clothes."

"Then, what am I to wear?"

"Proper clothes like ayah wearing now."

"I shall do nothing of the sort. Go and fetch my tea-gown at once."

"No, memsahib; that not proper sense way at all. She not give me, but she making plenty abuse, and saying to ayah, 'You not come here making carry tales. She nobody in the house, but you do my orders.' She very bad violent old woman that."

"I must, and will, have it back," exclaimed poor Maude.

"That not possible."

"Then what am I to wear?"

"This clothes she give; say too that very fine clothes for that Mowlah Bux's wife."

With which the ayah took up a white bundle from off the bed, and displayed (1) a voluminous native skirt, and (2) a long *sari* or shawl, such as the native women wear over their heads. Both were of the finest muslin, and nice enough to look at under more favourable conditions, but simply maddening to poor Maude just then.

"How can I wear such things?" she asked. "Why, I don't even know how to put them on."

"That very easy. I show the memsahib how." And without waiting she at once threw the skirt over Maude's shoulders, fastened it at the waist, and then arranged the *sari* over her head in the most becoming fashion, had her mistress been in any humour to see such things. However, at one point Maude drew the line. She refused to have the thing over her head, though she assisted, with a woman's deftness, in so fashioning it as to form the best substitute for a bodice they could devise at the moment.

It was her mother-in-law in person who brought her in her breakfast. The old harridan eyed her with

a triumphant scowl as she saw the change which her new apparel had wrought in her appearance. She misread the signs. She thought the clothes were something, and Maude's consenting to wear them even more. But if she counted on an easy triumph she was utterly at fault. The new clothes were Hobson's choice; the theft of the old ones only served to put Maude on her guard. Her determination to fight the whole crew was not shaken in the least.

The morning hung heavy on her hands, for her gaolers had been careful that she should have nothing to amuse her or help to pass the time. Punctually at twelve o'clock the ayah, who so far had not left her, asked permission to go and get her food, and Maude had no choice but to let her go.

When left alone somehow the full discomfort of her situation came on her with redoubled force. The place was close and confined, the air hot and stuffy, and sundry evil odours kept finding their way in from the premises outside. The sounds too were annoying, and the prevailing atmosphere of bald discomfort, heightened by filth and the lack of amusement, set her wondering with redoubled vigour how long it would be before her friends could trace her and set her free. Only one grain of comfort she had. Whether it was that the excitement had braced her nerves or she had really been better than she thought, the fact was beyond question that she was so far none the worse for what she had gone through.

The ayah had been gone half an hour or more, when she heard the sound of some one moving in the outer room. A momentary dread that this might be he

husband was speedily dispelled—the footsteps were too light, and, indeed, there seemed to be a pattering as of more than one pair of small feet. Rising softly, she walked across and lifted the curtain, to find herself confronted by two rather pretty native children, a girl and a boy, of perhaps five and six years of age respectively, though it was difficult to make certain, so old-fashioned were the pair.

At first the small intruders laughed and seemed inclined to draw back. But as the fit of shyness wore off, they walked hand in hand into the room, where they stood watching Maude with interest and amusement combined.

Maude was sorry that her ignorance of their language prevented her speaking to them or even asking who they were. But she made signs to them to come nearer, and showed them her rings, which amused them greatly, and emboldened the girl to show some bangles of her own. And so a quarter of an hour passed pleasantly enough. Then there was a sound as of some one calling outside, whereupon the children laughed and ran in and hid themselves behind the bed on which Maude herself was sitting.

Footsteps followed the sounds, which, drawing nearer and nearer, ended in the entry of a native woman, young in actual years but prematurely aged as they mostly are, who, on seeing the children behind Maude, stopped dead, and stared at the group in dismay, while the youngsters laughed and clapped their hands as if the joke was a good one. And so things remained till Mowlah Bux's mother came shuffling in in her turn. Directly she saw the young woman she cuffed

her, and at the same time put her a sharp question, which the trembling girl, who seemed to stand in great awe of her senior, answered by pointing at the two culprits behind the bed.

The sight seemed to enrage the old woman, who made a rush to try and drag the children away, on which Maude, fearing that she meant violence to the children as well, interposed. This caused the harridan to turn her attention to Maude herself. At first she confined herself to chattering and threatening, but seeing that this made no effect, she deliberately raised her hand and struck the Englishwoman on the face.

This was too much for Maude, who, when in England and in the enjoyment of her proper health, had been great at tennis, not to mention golf and sculling. She was naturally a muscular young woman, and as just then indignation helped to counterbalance the ravages of her late illness, she quietly rose, caught the old woman above her two elbows and pinned her arms to her sides, exclaiming as she did so, "How dare you strike me?"

In vain the old woman, pouring out abusive language (which, fortunately, Maude could not understand), struggled to get free, but tough as she was, that proved to be a task beyond her strength. The noise had by this time brought the ayah on the scene, seeing which Maude let go her hold. On this the old beldame drove the younger woman (who had in the confusion got hold of the two children) through the door and followed them herself without saying another word.

"What does it all mean? `Why was she so angry?" asked Maude.

"She not liking any one coming to see the mem-sahib," was the answer.

"She is a dreadful old woman," said Maude. "First she cuffed that poor girl, and then because I tried to stop her beating the children, she struck me too. What was it all about?"

"Perhaps that Mowlah Bux tell her you not let the children come here."

"Why not? What harm was there in it?"

"I not know, but I think he say that much."

A sudden idea struck Maude.

"Whose children were they?" she asked.

The ayah looked queerly at her.

"That Mowlah Bux's son," she said.

Still the truth had not dawned upon Maude's mind.

"Poor little things," she said softly. "When did their mother die?"

"Their mother not dead yet," she said, "you just seen her. That woman gone take them away—that Mowlah Bux's *other wife*!"

Maude fairly staggered to the bed, on which she sat down, half-dazed. In all the horrors which she had pictured to herself during her reflections over her fate, this had never entered into her head. In all her talks with Mr. Bacchus in the vanished suburban days, he had sometimes alluded to his desire to marry, but he had never in the most distant way hinted at having a wife in the East. Further, he had, of his own accord, once volunteered the statement that it was usual with the better class of native

Mohammedan gentlemen to waive their right to marry more than one wife, following the rule among their Hindu compatriots, whom they had elected to copy in this solitary respect. Once again she had to acknowledge the wisdom of Colonel Eustace's advice. He had so strongly urged her to make a few inquiries before committing herself to accept this man on his own unsupported word. Never in her wildest fears had she imagined anything so degrading to herself as this—that he had in his own home a wife and children—that she, a well-born, highly-educated English lady, was only Mrs. Mowlah Bux, Number 2.

She never doubted the truth of the ayah's statement, for its very horror, in her mind, stamped it with the impress of truth. Hard, dry-eyed, half-demented, she sat on the bed brooding over this last dreadful development of the consequences of her own rash act, while the ayah, who, like all her late servants, had been bribed to conceal the truth, watched her, and wondered how the memsahib liked the news.

And so Mowlah Bux found her when, presently, he came hurrying in to have a few words with his wife. But, after glancing at her, he said a few words rapidly in Hindustani to the ayah, who, after a doubting look at her mistress, rose as if to leave the room. Maude saw her going, and, having no wish to be left alone with this man, whom she both hated and feared, called to her to stop.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"I have sent her away," said Mowlah Bux coolly.

"I have something to say to you which I do not care for her to overhear."

"Ayah, don't go."

"You had better," snarled the man.

The ayah had not her mistress's pluck. She moved towards the door, seeing which, Maude, in her despair, flung herself forward, and caught at the woman's skirt.

"For heaven's sake, don't leave me!" she cried. "Ayah, you must not abandon me to the mercy of that man. You have sisters—perhaps daughters—of your own. Think of them, and don't desert me now!"

Whatever answer the astonished servant might have made to this appeal Mowlah Bux did not give her much chance to decide.

"Nonsense," he said, roughly jerking the skirt out of his wife's hands. "Go." And as the unfortunate girl sank sobbing on her knees, he pushed her last protectress through the door of the outer room.

The bolt shot to, and, as it did so, Maude sprang to her feet, and, with the courage of despair, caught up the light native bed, and threw it across the open doorway between the two rooms.

"Cross that doorway and I will strangle myself with my own hands," she cried, rapidly twisting the fine muslin shawl into a rope and passing it round her neck.

The threat was a futile one, but it was good enough to terrify a cur like Mowlah Bux. That gentleman's cowardly heart had once already that afternoon been sadly perturbed by finding himself all but implicated

in a religious riot got up in a hurry between his co-religionists and the Hindus. And when he had fled to avoid the chance of doing anything so distasteful to the English officials, he had been greeted on his return home by the pleasing intelligence that the murder was out, that Maude was acquainted with the little deception that he had played on her successfully for so long.

A coward is usually a bully when he gets the chance. Just then Mowlah Bux was full of fine religious fury, and in no mood to stand any nonsense from the woman in his own house. On learning what had occurred, he had relieved his feelings by first beating his elder wife and cursing his mother, and, feeling refreshed by these exercises, had considered himself equal to the task of explaining to his victim the fresh schemes he had in view. Maude's attitude was disconcerting. At bottom he had the true native respect for anything of the nature of European blood. He fully believed that Maude was capable of carrying out her threat, and as that would mean an inquiry, a great scandal, and certain ruin to himself, he was averse to forcing her to extremities. He wanted to get his plans carried through, for he was keenly alive to the necessity for despatch. Hewett's spies had, as usual, sold him to the other side, and through certain influential natives Mowlah Bux had learned how close Eustace and Collard were on his track. All he wanted was to compromise Maude, and then he guessed that neither she nor her friends would wish to molest him any more.

"I have no wish to cross the door," he said. "I came to speak to you, not for any other purpose."

"If you dare to pollute me by laying a finger on me, I will kill myself."

"Really, Maude, I can't understand you," he replied. "You used not to be like this in England."

"Nor were you," she retorted. "But at least I did not fawn and lie to deceive an unfortunate girl to her ruin."

"You might have known I was married," he said, sulkily. "It is the custom of my country. I should have told you if you had ever asked me."

"I never thought of this," she answered. "But now I know the truth, and know you for what you are, I will never again consider myself your wife."

"The law thinks differently," he said, with a grin of malice. "My religion does not forbid me to take two wives."

"But my religion does, and by it I mean to be guided."

"You cannot help yourself."

"There will be plenty to help me when they know the truth."

"That Eustace and the doctor?" he asked, with a sneer. "Don't flatter yourself that they will care what happens to you now. Besides, even if they did, what can they do? There is not an Englishman in the world who dare come into this city on such an errand at such a time. After you have been living with me here for weeks in my own house, do you suppose they will care what becomes of you next?"

"You coward. They are not as black of heart as you."

"A woman's words hurt no man. He can laugh who is winning."

"You will never win."

"I am not so sure of that. I came to tell you what is going to be done, and then you shall be free to say whether you will behave yourself or not. To-morrow night I hold here a feast in honour of our marriage, and in the morning the *kazi* will pronounce the nuptial blessing as the law directs. You will then be my wife by our law as well as by your own."

"I will neither come, nor, if you dare to drag me there, consent."

Then Mowlah Bux laughed out loud.

"Who wants you to?" he asked, jeeringly. "I have a woman of my kindred who is about your size, and my mother already has your gown. By the time your deputy has shown herself and has performed the necessary ceremonies, there will be a hundred witnesses to prove the fact. What will your friends say or do when they hear the news? I should really come if I were you. It will be interesting to one who used to profess to be so anxious to learn something of our curious native ways."

He spoke in his cruellest and most mocking way. He thought the plot had been so skilfully contrived that it simply could not fail. And for the moment poor Maude thought so too. The ruin seemed complete—escape impossible on every ground. So far her courage and great despair had combined to help her

from breaking down. But on hearing of this last diabolical plot for swearing away her honour and good name she collapsed. Greatly to the discomfiture of Mowlah Bux, who, for the moment, thought that she had carried out her threat and taken her own life, she fell to the ground in a dead faint.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FRIGHTENED out of his wits, and dreading the worst, Mowlah Bux ran shrieking to the door to call for aid, and soon the room was filled with the women of the house, who in a trice had Maude upon the bed and were hard at work at such remedies as their inexperience knew. But this time their task was not an easy one. The double shock had been too much for Maude, and, now that her efforts to protect herself seemed so utterly frustrated, the determination not to break down, which had so far carried her through, exacted its tardy, but none the less severe, revenge.

As for the lord and master of them all, he was literally shaking with fear, not for his poor victim, but for his cowardly self. He hung about the doorway bothering the women with useless inquiries as to how Maude was getting on, and conjuring up the while visions of all the inconveniences which he knew must follow swiftly on her death in that place.

When presently he was able to catch his mother's eye he drew her aside and asked her what she thought.

"Is she going to die?" he asked.

"Going to die? No. She has only fainted and come to again."

"It would never do for her to die," he said nervously.

"Die? Why do you harp on that? I tell you, Mowlah Bux, that you are a fool. You ought to know that these Englishwomen are as strong as horses. There is no fear of their dying like this. Out upon you. Son of mine though you be, you are no better than a coward to have such thoughts."

"Come over here, mother. I *will* speak my mind, and it is as well that we should not be overheard. Listen. This has gone far enough, and I will do no more, lest she die and ruin me with the *sahiblog*. I never meant this when I agreed to her being brought to your house."

"But I did, and more besides. I tell you, Mowlah Bux, that my mind is made up that she shall never leave this house till she is lawfully your wife in the sight of all our people. If you have no regard for our *izzat*, I have, and I am not going to permit a jade like this girl to marry you and then cast you aside when she pleases. You men are no better than fools, and it is just as well that you have your mothers to teach you how to treat your wives."

"Woman, I say again that I will not go further. These are not like the women of our country. They are but little less than men. Had you let me go my own way without your everlasting interference, things might have gone all right, but you would not let us alone. Now, thanks to you, she will either for ever disgrace me by going back to her own people or she will die, and so ruin us all for ever."

"She will do neither. Well," to the ayah, who

was standing by, waiting a chance of speaking, "what is it? What do you want?"

"I think you ought to send for the *hakim*. The memsahib is very ill, and talks folly, just like she did when she was first taken ill."

"Nonsense," cried the beldame. "She has had too many doctors already."

"I did not ask you, *Mai*," retorted the woman defiantly, for she, too, was getting uncomfortable over the way that things were tending. "I tell it to your son, who is her husband."

But there was still one point on which, in spite of his fears, the *vakil* was adamant.

"I agree with my mother," he put in hastily. - "We have had too many strange men in this house already, and I will have no more."

"Then pay me my wages and let me go," said the ayah, who was selfish enough where her own interests were concerned. "This lady is dying, and if she does die without your summoning the aid of her own people, the *sahiblog* will call it murder. Pay me and I will go, I say."

"Mother, perhaps she is right."

"Mowlah Bux, are you bewitched? This comes of having you sent to be educated in that accursed land of *kafirs*. Once let a stranger man set foot in this house in which, bride, wife, mother, or widow, I have spent five-and-thirty years of my life, and I will go forth never to return."

"What can I do? I repeat we cannot let her die."

"Do? Why send for Mukti Jan, the wise woman from Hatim Rai's *busti* near at hand, and let her see

her. Surely what was always good enough for your people, for your mother, your sisters, and your other wife, is good enough for this stranger you have brought among us, who is pretending, for all I know."

"Yes, yes, send for Mukti Jan, at all events," cried the ayah, who thought this an easy way out of the difficulty. "Let her come and say what should be done. But send quickly, whatever you do."

"Well, I will send for her," said the old crone grumblingly. "But I repeat that she is shamming. However, Mukti Jan is skilled at women's ailments, and she will find her out," with which she shuffled off to another part of the building to execute her errand, while the ayah returned to her mistress's bedside, and Mowlah Bux retired to the courtyard to take counsel with himself.

It is only fair to a man who necessarily has appeared in the most unfavourable light imaginable to admit that this situation was none of his creating, or, if blame attached to him personally, it was the blame of weakly consenting to be a party to his mother's schemes. It is quite true that he was at bottom little better than a savage in this matter of the treatment of woman, as uncivilised, as unregenerate as any of his forefathers had been for centuries before. Moreover, he was not (even when judged by the native standard) a gentleman, and he was weak and cowardly as well. Yet, with all these disadvantages, he had meant well enough at the start. Of deep affection for any woman, as we understand it, he was probably incapable: indeed, such a thing never enters into the

relations of the sexes among his people, where the man is lord and master and the woman little better than a slave. But he was further suffering from another institution of the zenana—the tolerating of some old shrew who is permitted to lord it over the younger women, and even to dispute the actions of the master himself. In Mowlah Bux's household this position of trust was occupied by his own mother, and it was, as he had stated, her promptings which led him into this last fatal course.

Mowlah Bux's matrimonial venture had been wrecked by the system prevailing in his native land, a system which had grown up through the selfishness of the stronger sex, sanctioned by the laws of the most selfish creed the world has ever accepted for long. It is not that in the East the men are needlessly wicked, or the women more degraded of themselves than their sisters in more favoured lands. Very likely if the, at present, impenetrable veil which hangs before the zenana were lifted, we should find many shining examples of domestic happiness to balance the cruel stories which have found their way into the outer world. But even these will only be where men are gentle and forbearing, and the women easily content with the little that may be given them to gladden their lives. It may be centuries before the women of India are admitted to anything like equality with men, such as has been the lot of their sisters in Europe from the earliest ages. And gild the present as we may, there will always remain the darker, wicked side, where the men are sunk in vice, the women unrestrained by any proper sense of honour, or a

religious responsibility, or even educated to an understanding of the proprieties of life.

Mowlah Bux in his own person was a victim of this cruel system. His education in Europe had opened his eyes to the fact that women were, in every particular, suited to be the helpmates instead of the slaves of men. And, not lacking sense, he had grasped at the chance of allying himself to one of these emancipated beings. But (as he ought to have known, and would have remembered had he taken the trouble to think) the only chance for such a venture was complete separation from his own people, who were too impregnated with their own narrow notions to be able to view with equanimity his taking such a course. In his father's house the customs of ages rose up, as it were, in judgment against him, and prevented his ever succeeding in rubbing along amicably with his English wife. Between her and himself stood his obstinate and prejudiced old mother, steeped in the notions of her creed, furious at the prospect of supersession, not only in the affections of her only son, but in the household in which, by right of seniority, she had for long maintained an unchallenged sway.

A little firmness would have saved the situation for a time, but firmness and Mowlah Bux were things not to be named together. Maude had never, from the moment when her eyes began to be opened to what she had done, made the slightest effort to retain what slender influence she possessed, and all the time when she was sick and ill, and her husband banished from the house, he had been subjected to the fiercest attack imaginable on the part of his relations of both sexes,

led and encouraged by his mother, the only person who had really ever had him completely under her thumb. And so he had been screwed up to the point, and had actually set to work to try and level Maude down to the women whom she had come out to India to raise from their degraded state.

But now he was entering upon another fit. His English education was perhaps only surface deep, but he had learned enough to know that some things, common enough in his own country, could not be safely tried on one of the governing race. And, caught as he was between his mother and the knowledge of the ruin threatening him should anything happen to his English wife, his feelings, as he paced the dreary courtyard waiting for news, are easier imagined than described.

He had not very long to wait. The wise woman's home was near, and she, fortunately, happened to be in when the messenger arrived. And presently the *vakil* spied her being escorted across the yard towards the women's quarter of the house.

In point of mere appearance, the new-comer was a decided improvement on her employer. When she threw back the long *burkah* or veil which she wore rather by way of disguise than from any personal modesty, she displayed not only a portly figure, but a round, good-tempered face. Unfortunately, when it has been said that she was pleasant-looking and good-natured the catalogue of her good points ends, for her ignorance of her profession (which was that of a *dhur* or native monthly nurse) was appalling, and any chance she might have had of learning by practice

how to be of some slender use was quite obscured by sundry quackeries and nostrums which had come down to her by oral tradition from an endless line of predecessors in her important art. For the rest she was as complete an old gossip and scandal-monger as the whole world could produce. Adding as she did to her legitimate profession those of match-maker in ordinary and news-carrier to her whole *clientèle*, she had learned by experience that in those dreary prison-houses to which she alone of all the town had access, it was far oftener the mind than the body that was diseased. Her great skill in the news-and-scandal line had long since made her a prime favourite with all her patients, while the fact that she was very good-natured, very shrewd at guessing what was amiss, and had sufficient address to prevent her various peccadillos in the scandal-mongering line from reaching the ears of those most affected, had combined to raise her to the very head and forefront of her profession in the city of Khurruckpore.

"Well, *Mai*, what is it this time?" she asked of Mowlah Bux's mama.

"My son's wife is sick."

"Dear, dear, how unfortunate, and at the Feast time, too. Well, I should never have expected it, for I only saw her yesterday and——"

"It is not Ruzzeea at all, O Mukti Jan; it is that other wife he has just married in Bombay."

"His English wife? Is she here?"

"How did you know that he had an English wife?" asked the old dame sharply. "I never told you, did I?"

"How could it be hid when he took that bungalow in the European quarter?"

"True. Well, she is here, and pretending to be sick. I told Mowlah Bux what would happen when he came to say what he had done, and see how my words come true. If he could not be contented with one wife, as his father was, why did he not seek one among his own people?"

"True, true," replied the *dhai* soothingly, for she saw that the other was only working herself into a rage.

"She was only brought here yesterday, and see, now she pretends to be dying, only to spite us all."

"Is she very ill?"

"Who knows? How should I, at all events? That is for you to decide. Go now, good Mukti Jan, while I sit here and rest and eat a little fresh *pan* till you have done."

Nothing could have suited the old gossip better than to be able to visit her patient without the keen old woman (whom she knew well of old) at her elbow all the time. Nor was she displeased when the girl who took her to the sick chamber bolted the door behind her as she passed her in. This argued a freedom from interruption, which was what she much preferred.

The room had been cleared of all intruders, and besides Maude, who was still lying on the bed, there was no one there except the ayah, who greeted the new arrival as soon as she could see who it was.

"Welcome, mother, I am right glad to see you to-night."

"Who is it? Ah! it is you still here, I see," replied

Mukti Jan. She and the ayah were also old acquaintances, and had met quite recently at the bungalow, whither the *dhai* had hied one day in the exercise of her profession of collecting all the latest and most piquant news.

"Yes, I am here—worse luck to it," grumbled the ayah, "and I only wish I were well out of it."

"Why so, child?"

"Because among them they want to kill this mem-sahib, and I shall have to share the blame. It will ruin me in my service."

"Is she very ill, then?"

"Just as she was when she nearly died before."

"Stand aside and let me see her," replied the other, lifting the lamp in order to better accomplish her purpose.

"She is out of her senses," she said presently, after two or three futile efforts to make Maude conscious of her presence.

"Of course she is," retorted the ayah, "and has been so this hour or more, only that old witch, the Mowlah Bux's mother, can't or won't believe it."

The other made no reply.

"What are you going to do?" asked the ayah.

"I don't know—I don't like the thing at all. If it were one of our own people, I would just give her a charm and a clever posset of which I have the receipt, and then leave things to take their course, as Allah wills. But she is one of the *sahiblog*, and I must be careful. Has she any friends?"

"Several—Rahim Khan, the *hakim*, for one."

"Don't mention him," exclaimed the woman

angrily. "He and I are not friends. He has tried to make out that it was my clumsiness that killed Daud Shah's wife. Who else?"

"The civil doctor sahib."

"More doctors? How does he know her?"

"He took care of her when she was sick before."

"Any others?"

"They say she is great friend of the new Generally-adjutant sahib."

"Oho! So she has great friends. It will be foolish for you or me, *jee*, to meddle in this business, that is clear. But tell me, how come she here?"

"Mowlah Bux's orders. He had her kidnapped."

"The son of Satan. Who put such folly into his head as this?"

"His mother."

"She is an old fool, though there is no need for you to tell I said so. Well, we must think this out. Have you any *pan*, sister?"

The ayah at once produced the condiment, which they shared and chewed in silence for a minute or two.

"Yes," said the *dhai* presently, after a little thought, "this is no ordinary case. I have never had *jail-khana* yet, sister, and I do not want to begin old, as I am now. You may be sure that if we remain silent and anything were to happen to this poor lady, they would blame you and me."

"I know it. I told Mowlah Bux this very evening that I would not stay here at such a risk. I shall go now; I see you agree with me."

"Don't be a fool, *jee*, but let me think a space."

Three minutes later she rose to go.

"I cannot yet see my way clearly," she said, as she readjusted her veil, "but you may trust to me to do what is wise and right. Say nothing to any one that we have been talking to-night."

Before, however, she could leave the room the door was opened, and Mowlah Bux's mother appeared.

"Well?" she asked eagerly, for her confidence was a little shaken by reflection, and she wanted to set her mind at rest.

"Perhaps she will be better soon. I will send her a potion, the receipt for which was given me by a very learned woman indeed. Undoubtedly she will be better soon, *Mai*, but do not disturb her now. I will send you the medicine. It is one which exactly suits her age and the day of the month."

Now, Mowlah Bux's mother was too full of her own anxieties to notice the unwonted lack of assurance which the other displayed. The truth was that in a few hours' time the guests would be flocking to the wedding, and it would never do for the opportunity on which she and her son had built so much to be lost because the intended bride was sick.

"Do you think she is shamming?" she asked.

"Oh, dear no," was the disconcerting reply. "She is undoubtedly sick, but it will pass away without fail after she has taken my draught."

"Very well. Good night. You will come again?"

"Oh, yes, to-morrow before mid-day. But have no fear. She will be better soon, I think."

But the usually cautious woman was so flurried that she forgot for once to pull down the front of her veil over her face, so that she was easily to be

identified by those she met. Not that there was likely to be anybody in the narrow gully, shut in by high windowless walls, at the bottom of which stood the entrance gateway of Mowlah Bux's house. But as she was picking her way gingerly along the cleanest part, trying to avoid the heap of decayed and stinking vegetable matter which lay scattered in lavish untidiness on every side, some one came shooting out of the shadow and blocked the road.

"Mukti Jan, is it you?"

"It is, but who are you?"

"Buddhoo *mehter*, who have got the sack from the bungalow of the Mowlah Bux."

"Well, what do you want?"

"I don't know. I thinking that perhaps you tell me," answered the fellow.

"Where can we talk?"

The woman was ready enough to see that there was more behind. She knew something of the fellow of old.

"You can follow me home, Buddhoo," she said, "and say what you have to say to me there."

CHAPTER XXX.

ALL through that long and trying day Colonel Eustace had had his hands full. The Commissioner of Khurruckpore had been more than wontedly nervous about the condition of affairs, and had made up his mind that, on this occasion, the rioting was destined to go beyond its usual mild limits. Hewett, the policeman, in conveying this message to Eustace (as the senior staff officer) early that day had confessed that he did not himself altogether share his chief's apprehensions, but as they were all agreed that a timely display of force could do no possible harm, it was arranged that it should be forthcoming if required. Later in the afternoon, however, he was back again with intelligence that already there had been one or two minor outbreaks, and that the Commissioner considered it advisable that, under the circumstances, the city had better be patrolled that night.

"Very well," said Eustace. "I have the General's authority to do all that is necessary. As there is no actual riot in progress, a squadron of cavalry will, I think, answer your purpose, and it shall be ready for you at ten o'clock, if that will suit."

"Capitally, I will ride with them, and perhaps Hawkins, the Deputy Commissioner, will do the same."

"By the way, Hewett, have you any news of the missing lady?"

"Yes, and not good news either. Beera Singh reports that he has no doubt that this fellow has her locked up in his house, where she will have to remain till this other row is over."

"He is not certain he is right?"

"No, or I might be tempted to send for Mowlah Bux to ask him what he means by it."

"I wish that your fellows could make certain."

"So do I; but they are so overworked now that I cannot ask them to do more till this pressure is over."

"Of course, I quite understand that. Well, good night, Hewett; I'll see about the cavalry. By the way, where will you join them?"

"Oh, they'll have to pass the police barracks, anyway. I'll look out for them there soon after ten o'clock. Good night."

As Hewett left him Eustace turned wearily again to his work. But his interview with the policeman had reminded him of his own troubles, and he found some difficulty in fixing his attention again. And so five o'clock found him still in his chair, much to the disgust of his clerks, and of the office messengers in the verandah.

He was sitting there deep in thought, with his head resting on his hand, when his head man put his head in at the door.

"Will you require the clerks any longer, sir?"

"No; let them all go, by all means. Is there a mounted orderly here? I have a note for the Commandant of the Native Cavalry, which is urgent."

He scribbled an official order, as well as a private note, and handed both to the sergeant to despatch.

"Make him out a receipt to get signed, and tell him to bring it to me wherever he can find me," he said.

The sergeant withdrew, and Eustace dived into a bundle of papers in a basket by his side, and commenced to deal with them. But it was no use. He simply could not fix his attention. He was constantly thinking of that unlucky girl in Mowlah Bux's hands.

If only he had done as he was so sorely tempted to do in Bombay, and asked her to marry him instead of walking into this ugly trap. There are always so many "ifs" in such cases, but if she had consented, what a world of trouble it would have saved them both, her especially, but himself as well in no inconsiderable degree. For little as he would have cared to confess it, and hard as he struggled to keep the influence at bay, two things were working in his mind, pity and admiration, which combined to make him regret the impossibility now of throwing himself at her feet. That week on board ship had done the mischief, and many a time and oft the Colonel had regretted bitterly that he had let his scruples regarding John Strachey stay his hand. He had done nothing which could benefit his cousin one whit, while he had wrecked his own happiness, along with that of the girl he had learned to admire too late. Somehow he never doubted that, if it had been offered to her, she would have accepted such a chance of escape.

At last he called to his clerk.

"You need not wait, sergeant," he said. "I may be here some little time longer, and a *chuprassi* will be all that I require. Who shuts up the office?"

"I lock up the papers, sir."

"Then take them now, and leave me out some note-paper. I will call the chowkidar when I leave. Good night!"

"Good night, sir," and the sergeant carried off his documents and withdrew.

But letter-writing came no easier than did official work. Eustace ended by inditing a short note or two, and then, abandoning his intention of preparing his correspondence for the English mail, he sealed up the notes which he had finished and left the office, calling to the chowkidar as he went.

By this time the night was falling in, and he felt, as he got into his trap, that he could not stand another dose of his own company, so he drove to the club and sat down in a corner by himself to dispose of a cheroot and a "peg." And here he was lucky enough to attract the attention of Mrs. Fairfax as she was passing into the building after leaving the tennis courts outside. Seeing her guest thus silent and solitary, she took pity on him, and coming across, seated herself by his side.

"You are very late, Colonel Eustace."

"Yes, I was working late, and then I wrote a letter or two, which made me later still."

"Letters? The mail went out yesterday."

"Did it? Well, it can't be helped. I seem to forget how time passes now-a-days."

"Because you are worried about something. I have noticed it ever since you met Mrs. Ashley at the church on Sunday."

"Perhaps you are right."

"I know I am. Come, confess as much?"

"To a certain extent it is true."

"Is it really true, as George told me this afternoon, that the poor lady has disappeared?"

"Mrs. Fairfax, I am afraid it is worse than that. We think, Collard and I, that she has been carried off by force."

"Who has done so?"

"Her scoundrel of a husband."

"And can't we help her?"

"We?"

"Yes, 'we,' for I want to help too, if I can, if only to try and make up for my past neglect in the matter."

"It is kind of you to say so, and I can assure you that she wants every friend that we can get for her. Mrs. Fairfax, I honestly believe that we none of us can picture the tortures she is suffering now."

"Tortures, Colonel Eustace?"

"Yes. Strong words suit the case. I cannot tell you—I never could tell you one-half of what I believe her to be undergoing at this moment."

"And why can't we help her?"

"Because the thing is impossible. That is all."

"Why not possible?" she demanded, with a woman's obstinate refusal to take 'no' for an answer.

Eustace told her most of what he knew, cursing in his own heart as he did so the absolute helplessness of all who wished Maude well.

Mrs. Fairfax heard him to the end, and asked a question or two on her own account regarding what he knew of the unhappy girl's life in Khurruckpore. For she had this characteristic of her class, that if her sympathy for a stranger, particularly for one of her own sex who had in a measure stepped without the pale, was once aroused, her interest was genuine and active, and before she and Colonel Eustace reached her house, she, like her companion, was chafing under that most maddening of all sensations, the knowledge of an irremediable wrong. As they turned in at the gate, she spoke her mind out freely.

"One thing I promise you, Colonel Eustace, and that is that whatever any of the others may say or do, I for one will do my best to make up to this poor woman for our past neglect. We have all been wickedly in the wrong, and I am sure that a little more charity off our part might have saved most of this misery, had we only displayed it in time."

"You must not be too hard on Khurruckpore," he answered, ready to find excuses even for Maude's enemies. "Remember that there was nothing in this case to mark it as in any way different from that of any other case of an Englishwoman (I do not say lady) marrying a native. The prejudice against these mixed marriages is as strong in other continents as in this."

"I know that," she said, "but it is unfair in a way, particularly as men are allowed to marry natives every day, and yet are not sent to Coventry, like your poor friend."

"The answer to that," said Eustace sadly, "involves a wide social question. I know at this time men in

good positions married to native ladies, who have to pay no heavier penalty for their choice than the deprivation of all society for their wife and children among the Europeans *simpur*. The social annihilation meted out to a woman who does the same thing is but another illustration of the inequality between the sexes which all good men deplore."

Then, feeling he was on dangerous ground, he changed the subject.

"Did I understand you have some one dining here to-night?" he asked.

"Oh, yes. Only Frank Smithson. His sisters were friends of mine at home."

CHAPTER XXXI.

MR. SMITHSON and his host were the only members of the quartette who enjoyed their dinner that night, for Mrs. Fairfax's spirits were depressed by the story she had heard that afternoon, and Eustace's care was too deep to be shaken off at will. Edith Fairfax would have been only too glad to make her young guest's evening a pleasant one, but under the shadow of the grim tragedy which hung over her other guest's friend she could not find it in her heart to be gay, and so she left it to her husband, who knew less of the story than she did, and who was older and less liable to be troubled with other people's cares, to entertain the stranger, which the honest Major accomplished at a minimum of effort on his own part by simply allowing the youngster to talk while he ate his own dinner and occasionally encouraged him with a friendly smile.

Mr. Smithson was in clover. Never before since he landed had he had such a chance as this. Here there were no grey-headed seniors to overawe him, no ribald brother-subalterns to chaff him down. For three whole months past he, as promising a bud as need be, had been planted in a veritable forcing-house of ideas,

without ever a decent chance of displaying all the fine effects of the treatment on his system, of showing to others the results of this plunge into the unknown on his receptive mind. Eustace, despite his high official position, looked so quiet and inoffensive that he felt no awe of him; the Major was his host, and, moreover, a man of few words; and Edith Fairfax an old friend. Now, there are few more remarkable things than the sudden development of a high-spirited English school-boy when he first lands in the wonderful East, and Mr. Smithson was an exceptionally good specimen of the tribe. So he prattled away, only thinking that it was all very new and wonderful to himself, and quite forgetting that of his hearers two at least had been through it all themselves, and knew a good deal more about it than he did. He talked so fast that he got no dinner to speak of himself, though he earned the gratitude of his hostess by quite covering the melancholy which was over the rest.

The boy was in high feather when Edith rose and left the gentlemen to their wine. He finished a full description of three ponies he was thinking of buying (knowing, as a matter of fact, as much about a horse as he did about a camel), and passed some scathing criticisms on the folly of a native horse-dealer (who, in the event, sold him a couple of screws at an outside price) trying to do *him*. And then, as he chattered away, there occurred to him the recollection of something he had seen the evening before, but which he had forgotten till that moment. So he paused in mid-stream of anecdote to take Colonel Eustace's opinion thereon.

"By the way, Colonel," he said, being politely desirous of bringing his silent and moody fellow-guest into the conversation, "I had a curious experience last night when I was giving my dogs a run."

Eustace looked up wearily, for this flow of small talk was inexpressibly boring to him, and prepared for some wonderful yarn regarding the dogs and a jackal, or perhaps a wild cat, such as he had heard at least a hundred times before. But the very first words of the story riveted his attention to what was being said.

"I had ridden round by the city wall," began Smithson, "and was just entering the far end of the civil lines, close by the jail, when, as I was riding past a large, rather neglected-looking bungalow——What's the matter, Colonel?"

"Nothing. Get on, get on."

Mr. Smithson drew up his collar, and did not seem quite satisfied, but the other's earnest face caused him to proceed with his tale.

"As I say, I was passing a rather neglected-looking building, when I heard loud cries for help. The voice was English, or, of course, I should not have understood it, and as the cries were in a woman's voice and came very sharp and real, I just turned my pony's head into the drive, gave him a touch of my heels, and landed in the verandah in a brace of shakes."

Again he paused, causing the Colonel to wonder whether he would ever get on, while Fairfax, by way of jogging him a bit, remarked questioningly, "Yes?"

"I had been certain that, as I scudded along, I had seen a woman—a white woman, too—struggling in

the verandah with a lot of natives. But though I rode all I knew how, when I got there I only found one native fellow standing by himself. The rest must have disappeared while the view was cut off by some bushes beside the drive."

"Rather awkward," suggested Fairfax chaffingly "Did you say you had come to call?"

"No. I asked him pat out what all the row was about, and to my surprise he answered in English, civilly enough, that it was a poor mad woman who had escaped from custody. Who do you suppose it was?"

"Some Eurasian, I expect. They swarm down there. What do you say, Colonel?"

"Wait a moment," replied Eustace. "Now, Smithson, try and answer a question or two for me carefully. Where was this bungalow? Right on the edge of the lines, with a big *pipul* tree with a white tomb under it just between the gates?"

"Now you mention it, there was."

"And you saw this English lady——"

"I was not near enough to swear she was English, Colonel," he answered, growing careful as he saw how much in earnest his questioner was. "But so far as I could judge at that distance, her appearance was English, as her cries certainly were."

"And the man you spoke to, could you describe his appearance?"

"Good lord, no! He was a native, and they are all so much alike I never can tell tother from which."

"Was he young or old?"

"Youngish, and, by the way, I think, in fact I am certain, that he wore a beard."

The Colonel turned to Fairfax.

"It was Mowlah Bux," he said gravely.

"Who's he?" asked the Major.

"Maude Ashley's husband, and I have not the slightest doubt that it was Maude herself whom Smithson here saw."

"What makes you think so?"

"It all exactly tallies. By the way, Smithson, what time did all this take place?"

"A few minutes after five o'clock. I looked at my watch as I rode out of the compound."

"Exactly. That was just the time she disappeared. I've no doubt now, Fairfax, but that she has been kidnapped. Thanks for your tale, Smithson," he added, rising to go, "but I'd have given five hundred rupees to have known of this last night. Well, what is it?"

For a native servant blocked the way.

"Dr. Collard sahib makes salaam to your honour."

"The very man I wanted to see, Fairfax. I must be off, and will trust to you to make my excuses to your wife."

And, without another word to Mr. Smithson, he left the room, leaving the youngster completely bewildered as to what it all meant.

"I say, Major, have I been putting my foot into it?" he asked.

"No, not exactly. But let us go and see what Edith is doing. This will interest her, I expect."

It did, indeed, interest his wife, for she was by this time keenly alive to all the points of the case. They found her in the drawing-room, where coffee was shortly afterwards served; but conversati-

flagged terribly while they sat and waited, two of them, at least, anxious to know what was going to be the upshot of the affair. As for Mr. Smithson, he was greatly fallen from his state of high contentment, so much so that, as if conscious of some horrible *faux pas*, he sat as glum and unhappy as he had been chatty and elated before.

When the servant came to remove the coffee cups, Edith asked him where Eustace was. "In his room with the doctor sahib," was the reply. "There was a memsahib there too."

"A memsahib?" exclaimed Mrs. Fairfax. "Who can it be? Not Mrs. Ashley, George?"

"Hardly possible, I think. Anyway, send him in some coffee. That might stir them up a bit."

But they were disappointed again. The Colonel would take no coffee, and all the information which they could gather was that he had ordered two horses to be saddled at once—a statement they could verify with their own ears, for the horses were even then being led up and down in the drive outside the verandah.

"What can it mean?" asked Edith for the twentieth time.

"Heaven knows. Something serious, I fear," was her husband's answer.

And so another ten minutes passed away, and the door was opened, and Eustace himself, in full *kharkhi* uniform, entered the room.

"Hullo, Colonel, what's up?" asked Fairfax in surprise.

"Nothing particular," was the answer. "Only I am

a little uneasy about what's going on in the city, and, as the cavalry are sending a squadron to patrol, I thought I would like to ride round with them."

"Oh," dubiously spoken. "And what have you done with Collard?"

"He's outside there in the verandah."

"Ask him in; he might like a 'peg.'"

"Well, don't keep him long," replied Eustace, looking at his watch. "Stay, I'll send him to you myself."

"Do, there's a good fellow."

"Collard, they want you, but don't delay longer than you can help; it's getting on for ten o'clock."

The doctor nodded his acquiescence, and walked past Eustace into the room. His friend was about to follow when he was caught by the arm.

"Colonel Eustace," said Mrs. Fairfax, "what does it all mean? Do tell me?"

"Nothing," he answered in a low voice, and then as she motioned to him to follow her to the far side of the broad verandah, he added, "it is only that we have heard for certain that Mrs. Ashley is in Mowlah Bux's house in the bazaar, where she is reported to be not only ill again, but in great personal danger."

"And you are going to rescue her?"

"Heaven knows, but I am going to try," was a stern answer.

"And what will you do with her?"

"Take her to Collard's house and put her in charge of Mary Bainbridge, who is sitting yonder in his trap."

"Oh, that is who it is? Well, I had hoped that I

was your friend. But, if I might suggest it, why not bring her here?"

"How could I, knowing what a trouble it would be to you? Besides, what would Fairfax say?"

"Nothing. George will consent to anything I ask him," she replied. "Will you bring her here?"

"That I will right readily," he said, not without emotion, for he was highly strung just then, and her evident desire to be kind to his unfortunate protégée touched him. "This was all we needed to encourage us. Please God, Mrs. Fairfax, among us we will pull her through her troubles yet in spite of that wretch, her husband."

"Bring her straight here when you have recovered possession of her."

"Not when, but if," he said gravely. "I only promised that we were going to try. I tell you all the same that it will be nothing short of a miracle if we do succeed. Meanwhile, you had better have Mrs. Bainbridge to assist you. Shall I tell her to come to you?"

"Please do. I will have a room all ready, and we must hope for the best. Take me to Mrs. Bainbridge now."

And Eustace did as he was bid.

"You'll have to stay here to-night, Mrs. Bainbridge," he said. "Jump down and help Mrs. Fairfax to get ready. She will see that you have everything that you want. And you can safely tell her all that you have told us. But we must be going, or we shall be too late for our appointment, and then we are ruined. Come along, Collard," he added, putting his

head into the room. "Ah! there you are. *Au revoir*, Mrs. Fairfax. Three hours or so will decide our fate, and then you will see us back again."

"If we are alive," was what Edith Fairfax was almost certain that she heard Collard mutter under his breath. But no more time was lost, and a minute later they were clattering down the drive towards the gateway.

"Right or left?" they heard the Colonel ask, and then in a short time the sound of the horses' feet died away in the distance.

"What's up, Edie?" asked the Major, who had come out into the verandah to see them start.

"I am not certain yet. For goodness sake, get rid of that boy as soon as you can, for I want to ask Mrs. Bainbridge all about it; and he is such a chatterbox that I dare not speak before him."

"But what takes Eustace out at this time of the night in uniform? Come, Edie, I don't half like the look of it."

"Nor do I," remarked Mary Bainbridge, coming forward into the light. "But, bless his kind heart, he never thinks of himself. Dr. Collard told him rightly enough that he is risking his commission and, perhaps, his life on as risky a throw as ever man dreamt of."

Fairfax waited to hear no more. He saw his wife was right, and whispering, "Get away to your own room for a few minutes," he wheeled round and walked back to his already disconsolate guest.

"Excuse my leaving you, old fellow," he said, "but the whole house is upset, and Edith's head is so bad she has had to go to her own room."

"Nothing very serious, I hope?"

"Oh, dear no. She'll be all right in the morning. What?" as the other rose and held out his hand, "Must you be going? Won't you have another 'peg'? No? Well, good night, good night."

And in this summary fashion, excusable in a man not a little worried on his own account, he showed the erstwhile hero of the evening out into the night.

CHAPTER XXXII.

As Eustace stepped out into the verandah in obedience to Collard's summons, he had found his friend waiting.

"Well, what is it?" he had asked.

"Thank heaven, I have found you in," was the answer. "I have news for you. Where can we have a quiet talk?"

"Come into my room. Who's that behind you?"

"Mrs. Bainbridge."

"Then you have come about Maude Ashley? Come in here, and let us have it out at once."

When he had ushered them into his own room, which was at the back of the house, and fairly secluded from the rest of the building, he carefully shut the door, and drew the curtain before it.

"What is the news?" he asked in a low voice (in which particular the others followed suit). "Bad?"

"Bad enough," replied Collard, turning to the sergeant's wife. "Perhaps I had better tell the story and you correct me if I forget anything?"

"Do, sir. You'll make him understand it better than ever I could."

"Well, Colonel, the tale is not a very long one, and

only relates to what has happened since we parted last night. It would seem that, when Mrs. Bainbridge went back to Mowlah Bux's bungalow last night to fetch her own things, she had some difficulty in getting in at all. When she did at last gain admittance, she surprised the master of the house busily engaged in packing his wife's trunks, which, in some confusion, he tried to explain to be a mere matter of precaution. But this did not satisfy Mrs. Bainbridge, to whom there occurred the bright inspiration of setting her cook-boy, Ghazi by name"— "Yes, Gassy, right enough," said the good woman with a nod—"to find out from the servants of the bungalow if they knew anything. It appears that this Ghazi had a caste-brother in Buddhoo the sweeper, who, while not actually knowing much, had guessed a good deal, and he, for a reward offered by Mrs. Bainbridge"— "A bottle of canteen rum," remarked the lady in a parenthesis—"undertook to hang about Mowlah Bux's house in the city to find out what he could. Just before sunset this evening he saw a woman, whom by her voice he recognised to be one Mukti Jan, a notorious though popular *dhai* of the city, hurriedly summoned to the house."

"A *dhai*? What on earth did they want with her?"

"You forget that our friend Mowlah Bux still pretends to be an orthodox Mussulman. These women, who are the curse of Indian women-kind" (the doctor may be forgiven a little professional feeling in such a matter) "act as medical advisers in every house, and it was for this purpose that she was required. She remained in the house some time, and when she came

out, this Buddhoo accosted her, and was told to follow her home. There in a very short time they learned that their interests were identical."

"In what way, man?" asked Eustace as the doctor paused.

"Well, the woman wanted to convey some information to us."

"To us? Had Maude bribed her?"

"No, but she had found Mrs. Ashley (to use the native expression) *behosh*, which may express any condition from a faint to delirium, though I fear that in this case it looks rather like the latter. Mukti Jan's motive is simple. She is an old enemy of mine, and very much afraid of me, and on learning from Mrs. Ashley's ayah, who, it would appear, is still with her mistress, that I had been attending her patient, she very prudently determined to have nothing to do with the case; but, while pretending to Mowlah Bux's people that she was treating it, she set to work to at once communicate privately with me. So she has sent word to Mrs. Bainbridge of the whole plot."

"Of the abduction?"

"Worse than that. They are going to marry Mrs. Ashley as soon as they can under compulsion to Mowlah Bux by their own rite, so as to finally complete the marriage and destroy the last objections of his own friends."

"Are they?" said the Colonel grimly. "There may be some others who intend to have a word in the matter. But tell me, doctor, could you find out in what condition the poor girl was in?"

"Very ill, I fear. Such a shock as this would have

the worst possible effect on her. She was in no condition to undergo such usage."

"Of course not," said Eustace, whose face had grown pale and ^{unset}. "Now, what are you and I going to do?"

"Nothing ^{at} present. What can we do single-handed? Remember what Hewett told us regarding the chances of getting the magistrates to interfere just now. You know as well as I do that it would take the whole garrison to cut her out, if her husband resisted, as he is sure to do."

The other, who had been pacing up and down the room, stopped short suddenly in his walk and wheeled round to face the speaker. A thought had struck him.

"By Jove," he said, "you have given me an idea, and, come what may, I'll try it."

"Try what?"

"To cut her out."

"Man, it's impossible!"

"It is nothing of the sort," replied the Colonel coolly. "Any way, I hope to try. Sit down, Mrs. Bainbridge, while I explain to Dr. Collard what I mean. It was arranged this afternoon between Hewett and myself that to-night, at ten o'clock, a squadron of native cavalry should be sent into the city to patrol on account of the disturbances. These fellows are *Jâts* to a man, and (as I need hardly remind you) have no sympathies with either of the two main factions in the town. I shall go with them, take them round by this fellow's house, and trust to chance to find the opportunity of snatching his unfortunate wife out of his clutches."

"My dear Colonel, excuse my telling you that it is madness to dream of any such thing. It would be nearly hopeless at any time; it is a sheer impossibility at a time when the whole place is seething with religious fanaticism."

"Madness or not, I mean to make the attempt."

"But just for a moment think of the consequences to yourself and to all concerned. Supposing they resist you and there is a riot, what will your position be? And even if you get clear off with your booty, you are very little better off, for when the husband complains, as his people are sure to make him do, what will be the result? You will be convicted of having used your official position for your private ends, and of taking the armed forces of the Crown to violate the sanctity of a native gentleman's house. For no magistrate will give you a warrant on such pretext at such a time."

"That is just why I don't mean to ask for one, but to take the law into my own hands."

"Colonel, I can't countenance this. Take time to think, and don't act on the spur of the moment like this."

"Where is the time to spare when Miss Ashley's whole future, perhaps her life, hangs on our taking instant action?"

"I am not prepared to say that. But I do know what it means to you."

"What?"

"To begin with, ruin in your profession."

"Well, I am ready to risk that."

"With your career before you, and the prospect of better luck still to come?"

"That's just it. I believe in my own luck, which will pull me through this business as through every other I have tried. Let us ask Mrs. Bainbridge what she thinks."

"That if I were a bit younger and handier at moving, I would go with you myself," was the staunch reply. "Yes, I'd go, if only for the pleasure of beating that black villain, Mowlah Bux, to a jelly, and of telling his mother what I think of her. It's no use your looking so scared, doctor, for I mean every word of it. I'm an Englishwoman for all my faults, and my blood boils when I think of the treatment that that poor child is getting even at this moment at their hands. And as for you, Colonel, I can only say I would do just what you propose. I've always called you the lucky boy, all the time that I've known you, and I can only say that if your luck fails you this time, it's a dirty mean thing that you will be well rid of."

Serious as was the moment, the two men looked at each other, and then smiled at her zeal.

"There, doctor, what do you say to that?" asked Eustace.

"That I will go with you, if they make me send in my papers for it to-morrow."

"Come, and welcome," said Eustace; "but remember that whatever blame attaches hereafter to this expedition is mine and mine alone. I can afford to be kicked out, whatever you can."

"That we can settle after; but at all events it is arranged that I come. I'll go and get a horse."

"Never mind that; I can find you a mount to save

time. Now, Mrs. Bainbridge, the only thing that remains to be settled is what we are to do with her when we have got her back."

The doctor was picking up a little of his friend's enthusiasm.

"Bring her to my house," he suggested. "It is the best thing that we can do under the circumstances. Mrs. Bainbridge here can then resume her place as nurse."

"With all the pleasure in life, sir."

"Then," said Eustace, "it only remains for me to change. I shall not be long."

And he disappeared into the dressing-room, leaving the others alone.

Collard's misgivings began once more to assert themselves.

"I greatly fear, Mrs. Bainbridge, that we shall do no good," he said.

"Never you fear, sir," she answered cheerily. "Perhaps you don't know the Colonel as well as I do, or you would believe in his luck. He has a good head on his shoulders, so just you trust to him to bring you through."

Which somehow comforted the doctor, who, despite his natural caution, was not one whit behind the others in his indignation at the treatment his patient had received, or less anxious than they were to restore her to her proper place in the world. So, as he waited, he took the opportunity of thinking out his own particular share in the affair. By the time that Eustace was ready he had a proposal to make.

"We shall want a dhooly and a guide," he said, as his companion reappeared.

"We shall. I was just thinking so myself."

"Well, here are both for you—the first from my dispensary, the other nearer to hand."

"Where is he?"

"Buddhoo himself."

"The very man, if he is to be depended upon."

"A bribe will soon settle that. I'll call him in at once and see."

A few words, and the timely display of sundry silver coins made the sweeper all their own. There was no surer way of rousing his enthusiasm than to jingle a few rupees, and as the Colonel in his anxiety opened the negotiations by the offer of twenty specimens of that degraded coin (five months' wages honestly earned), the fellow's eyes glistened as he promised everything they asked. So it was arranged that he was to proceed forthwith to a place in the city which Collard could find, and wait there till he saw them come, when he was to move ahead and show the way. Once he reached the house of Mowlah Bux, he was to be free to escape till such time as he saw fit to come to claim his reward, by which time the hubbub would have died away, and his own share in the transaction be forgotten, if ever any one should suspect him at all.

Having bidden the gentleman to set off like the wind for fear of being late at the rendezvous, Eustace suggested a move, as it was getting late.

"We had better say good night," he remarked.

"Mrs. Bainbridge here can drive over to your

bungalow in the cart, and get things ready against our return."

"Certainly."

But, as has been seen, the good woman had delayed her start till they were off, and so she was on the spot when Edith Fairfax's offer caused a change of plan, ready to help the kind-hearted girl in her effort to atone for past neglect, and able to explain to her and to her husband as much as she knew of the story and the Colonel's plan.

Regarding this last she was, by direction, very circumspect—merely saying that they were gone to see what could be done, but nothing of the method proposed. And when, in far more prolix terms than Collard, she had told all she knew of Maude's position and the risks she ran, the Major, to his wife's relief, spoke up in praise of what she had promised to do.

"You were quite right, Edie," he said. "Let us have this poor woman here by all means. The old cats may scratch and swear a bit, but you and I don't mind that. It makes one's blood boil to hear of such things happening—as they do oftener, perhaps, than we hear of—and to girls who step into the trap as innocently as I have no doubt, she did."

And he said it looking hard at his wife all the time, and thinking, rough soldier though he was, with a deep sense of thankfulness to a Higher Power that his girl-wife at all events had been spared this ordeal. And Mary Bainbridge, watching him closely, saw his emotion and guessed the cause, and in her turn was thankful that poor Maude at last had the chance of falling into the hands of people as kind as these.

Then the two women went off to get the room ready with their own hands, while the Major sat waiting, watch in hand. Usually he dozed if left alone after dinner, but to-night he was wide awake.

So they found him when they returned to share his watch. It was past midnight by this time, and the deadly stillness of the Indian night had settled on the place, broken only by the hoarse cries of the watchmen and the sound of the gong at the Infantry Quarter-Guard as it rang out the changing hour. Edith, worn out by excitement, dropped off to sleep in her chair, and the nurse followed suit. Both awoke at last with a start to find the Major holding back the curtain of the open door.

"There's something coming down the road," he said. And, indeed, they could hear the steady tramp of horses' feet on the *kunkur* road. At the same time, the clock rang out the hour of two. Then Fairfax stepped into the verandah.

"This will be them," he said.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"WHICH way?" asked Eustace, as they turned out of the compound.

"To the right, past the church," was the answer; and then they jogged on in silence, broken only when from time to time Collard gave fresh directions as to their road to his companion, who, in his impatience, was riding slightly in advance.

"Where is your dhooly?" asked Eustace presently.

"At the dispensary—we shall pass it directly," was the reply. "What is that striking—half-past nine? We have plenty of time."

"It won't do to let these fellows see the dhooly following us," remarked the Colonel. "Do you think you could manage to send it to some place where we can pick it up later on?"

"Certainly, I know the very spot. Here's the dispensary. Wait half a minute for me while I give the order."

Eustace reined up his horse, and sat waiting by the gate till in a very short time the cries of "Moollah Ram, Oh Moollah Ram, oho," told him that the team was being got together for the dhooly, and that that

part of his scheme was all right. Immediately afterwards Collard rejoined him.

"So far so good," said the doctor. "Now, Colonel, we can take our time. We have not much more than a mile to go to Hewett's house. By the way, do you mean to tell him what you propose to do?"

"No," said the other shortly.

"Why?"

"Because it is more than likely that he would object."

"He would only be doing his duty if he did."

"Exactly," replied Eustace with a short laugh. "And that is the reason why I don't mean to tell him till it is unavoidable. He must form his own conclusions when he finds us with the party. What is that noise?"

"It sounds like the cavalry, and if so, they are early."

"A good fault, when one is anxious to begin the job. We will wait here till they overtake us, and when they do, you leave the talking to me."

"For the last time, Colonel, you fully understand what you are going to do?"

"Perfectly."

"And mean to persevere, even though you know the probable consequences to yourself?"

"I do. The only difficulty, in my mind, is the risk of dragging the troops into the business. *That* I must avoid on all grounds. For myself I don't care a rap."

"You are reckless, in fact?"

"Not quite; but I have made up my mind that it is my duty to rescue Miss Ashley if the thing be

possible, and I shall leave no stone unturned to do so. I bitterly reproach myself for what has happened already, and it is a point of honour with me to set matters right. A man can't be worth much if he is not prepared to do something for the woman he—are they trotting?"

They both listened a moment before Collard answered him.

"No—only a horse shied, I fancy. You were saying——?"

"That as Maude Ashley's only friend, and the man who might have saved her in time if I had done right, I'll help her now, if they break me to-morrow for my pains."

"I know you mean it, and I hope you will believe me when I say that, for my part, I mean to stand by you——"

"At no risk to yourself, Collard, remember that. I only consent to your coming on the understanding that I take all the blame if there is trouble hereafter."

"It is good of you to say so, but I, too, am prepared to take my chance. Now, what are my orders?"

"To be ready to give the poor girl the benefit of your professional services if she needs them."

"Right. There's my hand on it."

"And one thing more you can do for me, doctor. Whatever may be said hereafter of my share in this night's work, I look to you to tell them that I worked with my eyes open, and that, rash as the plan seems, it is safe enough from everything, except that bad luck which no man can be sure of escaping."

"What is your plan?"

"To arrange so that in the course of our ride we pass through the street in which this house is placed. There on some pretext I shall halt the troop at a little distance, and, without telling them what I am going to do, shall enter the house, and insist upon Maude's being given the chance of coming away with me if she wishes to do so."

"You would do just as well without the cavalry."

"No, I should not. In the first place, they give me an excuse for being in the city at all. In the second, I shall have their moral support, because the certainty that powerful aid is at hand will make our Mowlah Bux careful. Of course, no greater mischance could happen to me, or to us all, than that they should be actually called upon to interfere. I am going to try to bluff this wily gentleman, and my greatest care will be exercised to show that I have not abused my official position to employ the forces, which are there to keep order, to provoke a riot on their own account."

"Simple, safe, and all but certain. You are right, Colonel. With a little luck, we are bound to succeed."

"Time will show. Well, here are the cavalry. Who is in command?"

The other waited till the officer who was riding at the head of the squadron was close to them before he replied.

"I think it is Wilmott," he said.

"Introduce me."

"Is that you, Wilmott?"

"Yes," was the answer, "but who the deuce are you?"

"Collard."

"Hullo, doctor! what are you doing out at this time of night? I see we are not to have a monopoly of midnight prowling. Are you going my way?"

"Part of the way at all events."

"Who is that with you?"

"Colonel Eustace."

"The A.A.G.?" exclaimed the other, touching his hat as Eustace rode out of the shadow in which he had been hidden behind Collard. "Good evening, sir; are you coming with us, too?"

"As a spectator. I thought I would like to see how the city looks at night, and whether things are as bad as they say."

"Very glad of your company, sir."

"Have you any other European officer with you?"

"No, sir, my subaltern is on leave. Which way shall we go?"

"That I will leave to you and Hewett. You must regard me as a spectator to-night."

"Very good, sir; here is the man himself. Good evening, Hewett!"

"It sounds like Wilmott," was the policeman's reply.

"Who have you with you?"

"Colonel Eustace and Collard."

"Eh, what's that? What are you two doing here?" asked Hewett suspiciously.

"Curiosity brings us," replied Eustace quietly.

"Hum! But why to-night, of all nights in the year?"

"Good chance of seeing how the city looks at night," said the Colonel coolly. "Now, as we are all here, Wilmott, you had better move off."

"Which way, Hewett?"

men display their wares, and by the open drains which run on either side. And along this restricted space there were making their way to and fro a seemingly inexhaustible crowd of natives, some haggling with the shopkeepers over the purchase of goods, a good many watching the process of bargaining with the keen enjoyment usual to their race, and a very few really trying to get along fast on business which forbade their loitering as they would doubtless have dearly liked to do. In such a dense throng rapid progress was impossible, and slowly, and far more carefully than the foot passengers, the leaders of the troopers threaded their way through the crowd, enjoying what was to them a most unusual sight. Nor did the appearance of a body of cavalry in the bazaar provoke much comment. The native mind is stolid, and not as a rule given to troubling itself with such questions as to the why and wherefore of the *Sircar* sending soldiers among them at that hour of the night. So, with true Eastern apathy, they dismissed the subject with a shrug of the shoulders, and the remark that "God knows wherefore they have come. There is no accounting for the vagaries of these aliens."

So right through the bazaar rode the troopers, with Eustace and Wilmott at their head, and Hewett watching, lynx-eyed, for the smallest sign of movement on the Colonel's part, close behind. On coming to the corresponding gate on the far side, they turned off and struck into less frequented streets, where once again the contrast of the silent and deserted quarters with the life and vivacity of the main thoroughfare was very marked. Over the bazaar which they had

just left there hung a blaze of light, and the roar of human voices, small in themselves but vast when united in volume, came booming from the distance, while they themselves rode in semi-darkness through the bye-ways, in a solemn silence only broken by the jingling of the troopers' accoutrements and the steady tramp of the horses' feet. And so on they rode, circling further and further from the busy centre, till at last Hewett made up his mind that Eustace did not know where he was or what he wanted, and Wilmott began to wonder whether, for his sins, he had been condemned to ride for ever with a worthy successor of the Wandering Jew.

The truth was that Eustace was a little puzzled how to find his way, without exciting Hewett's suspicions, to the appointed spot where he was to meet his guide. Moreover, he was in no hurry, as the later the hour the fewer people there would be about, and the less chance of interruption upsetting his plans. But at last a glance at his watch told him that it was close on midnight, when, feeling that he could not keep the troopers out much later, he turned to Hewett of his own accord.

"Well," he asked, "may we go home?"

"Certainly, so far as I am concerned. I think there is no cause for anxiety to-night."

"Quite so. Doctor, have you had enough?"

Collard saw the hint.

"I'd like to go round by that *thannah* I told you I wanted to visit," he said.

"I had forgotten it. Where is the place?"

"Perhaps Hewett could tell us?"

"Which of the stations is it? The one by the Abdulli Mosque?"

"Yes."

"First turn on your right, and a quarter of a mile down the road."

Eustace led the way.

"Nearly done, Wilmott," he said cheerfully. His companion had been silent and abstracted for an hour past.

"Oh, that's all right, Colonel," was the answer. "Any time is the same to me. Just as well be here as losing my shekels at whist in the mess."

There was no mistaking the police station when they got it in sight. The "Con-estible" (as they call him, just as if he were something to eat) on duty was in himself an indication. Moreover, as they rode up to it, the Colonel's quick eye detected both Buddhoo *Mehter* and the dhooly, waiting patiently for them to come. Directly the guide saw him, he rose and shuffled off down the street, out of which he shortly turned into an unfrequented bye-way, darker and even more silent than any they had visited before. Indeed, by this time there were few natives abroad. Night had settled on the city, and such of its inhabitants as had not retired to rest were hidden behind the walls of the various houses. And now once again did Eustace, in his anxiety not to lose sight of the guide, who, in spite of the stifling heat of the place, had muffled himself, for purposes of disguise, in a long sheet, forge somewhat ahead, thereby at once attracting the attention of the keen-eyed policeman, and causing him for the moment to forget the prevari-

cation of the man by his side. They had gone at least half a mile before he remembered that the *thannah* was past, and Collard's business was to all appearances vanished in thin air.

He turned to him for an explanation.

"I say, Collard, this wont do at all. What was your business at the *thannah*? Why, we did not even stop."

"Perhaps not, but all the same I did all that I wanted."

"What was that?"

The consciousness that they were now at last, as it were, on the stroke of the hour, that the crisis was at hand, acted on Collard's nerves, and caused him to loosen his tongue, a thing which was not altogether judicious under the circumstances.

"I picked up a dhooly that I had sent there," he said.

"A dhooly? Why? Oh, to carry off this woman, I suppose. Collard, I won't have it. Independent of my duty, which tells me to stop anything so wickedly mad as this attack on the privacy of a native's house and interference with his wife without the sanction of the law, I have no wish to be knocked on the head in a pothouse scuffle of this sort. You are bewitched by that madman of a colonel——"

"Nonsense, Hewett! What good is it your talking like this? At best you are only one man against a hundred, and powerless to coerce us. Besides, Eustace is not mad. He is as sane, cool-headed a man as you need wish to meet, and he knows quite well what he is doing. It is you who are mad to think of inter-

fering now, which is the surest way to bring on the catastrophe you are afraid of. Hullo, what's up now?"

For Eustace had turned his horse's head into an even darker alley, and, with Wilmott by his side, was waiting for the troop to pass. By chance the doctor and his companion drew into the opposite side of the road, and so were separated from their friends by the double line of armed men. Hewett saw his mistake, but it was too late to remedy it then, and he sat on his horse moodily watching his adversary, whom fortune had favoured once again.

"That will do, Wilmott," he heard Eustace say, when all but the rearmost files were past. "Please halt your men for a few minutes. I have some business to transact down this lane, and as I should prefer your company for the rest of the way, perhaps you would not mind waiting a short time for me."

Wilmott's face showed his surprise, but he at once acquiesced and waited his senior's convenience. The Colonel called up one of the troopers and gave him his horse to hold, himself dismounting. At the same time Hewett detected a dusky figure slinking out of the shadow on the far side of the road. But all his attention was for Eustace, and when he saw him dismount he pushed his horse close up to where he stood.

"Colonel Eustace, it is my duty to ask where you are going?" he said.

"To look up an acquaintance of mine," replied Eustace. "Doctor, that dhooly would be better a little closer up. Wilmott, please see that, unless some-

thing very unusual occurs, none of your men cross the entry here."

"Colonel," cried Hewett, "I must prevent you if I can."

"You can't, my dear sir," was the answer he got. "It is, so far as I am aware, no breach of the peace to knock at a man's door."

"You cannot, you must not, do anything so mad. I have reason to believe that at this moment half the fanatics in the place are collected in Mowlah Bux's house. They will cut your throat the instant you set foot on the threshold."

"I don't think so myself. But if they do, you and Wilmott will be witnesses that I have used no violence, and that the presence of the cavalry is accidental on their part. The fault, if anybody's, is mine."

He turned as he finished speaking, and groping his way down the alley, presently came to a door, on which he knocked. At the same time Hewett jumped to the ground, threw his bridle to Wilmott, who was an astonished spectator of all these queer goings-on, and hurried after the rash man.

"Colonel, this is murder and suicide," he cried, "and I won't stand by and see it done."

"Leave me alone," and again Eustace hammered on the gate.

"Let me answer for you, at all events," suggested the policeman. "You are far too excited to do so for yourself."

"I'm as cool as a cucumber. Let me alone, I say."

"I won't. There" (and he flung himself between

the other and the door), "I forbid you to come a step further."

"If the whole Government of India stood there in a row, they should not stop me," cried Eustace, who was getting angry. "Stand aside, or I'll make you."

But Hewett was fully as brave as the other, and as obstinate at times.

"Try," he said grimly.

"If you force me, I must. Great heaven! what is that?"

It did not need the Colonel's startled exclamation to call the attention of the rest. Hewett dropped his hand, raised in self-defence; Wilmott stepped forward, encumbered still by the bridle of the policeman's horse, which in the abstraction of listening to this wrangle (the cause of which he could not understand) he still held; while Collard stopped in the very act of hastening forward to join his friend after seeing that the dhooly was conveniently placed. Even the stolid troopers turned to listen, as shriek after shriek—as of a human being in mortal dread or agony—rang out in the stillness of the night.

The pause was but momentary, for Eustace sprang upon the obstructionist, and, catching him unawares, sent him spinning across the road. Then he put his shoulder to the door, which, as it chanced, was just being unbarred from the inside by the person who had come to answer his knock, and fell forward into the gateway beyond. Seeing this happen, Collard jumped after him, and Hewett, pulling himself together, followed suit, leaving only Wilmott, still holding the horse, alone in the dark alley behind.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MOWLAH BUX'S mother, after another look at her prisoner, and an audibly expressed opinion that she was shamming without a doubt, left the sick chamber very soon after Mukti Jan had taken her departure. The old woman did not deign to address another remark to the ayah, who, though a little comforted by the knowledge that the clever and quick-witted *dhai* was on her side, was still filled with apprehensions regarding her own probable share of the blame attaching to every one in the house, should the worst unfortunately supervene. As soon as the door shut behind the old crone, the servant took up the light, and, bending over her mistress, tried to read for herself the signs of the disease which once again seemed to have her in its grasp.

It did not require any very great acumen to see that Maude was really very ill. Her face was hot and flushed, her hands dry and feverish, and as she tossed from side to side of her narrow and uncomfortable couch she rambled in her talk, laughing, crying, shouting, and whispering by turns, but never showing the least sign of recognising the silent watcher by her side.

The ayah set the lamp down on the ground again, and then, after a rough attempt to smoothe the pillows as she had seen Mrs. Bainbridge do, retired to a corner of the little room, where she squatted down to muse over the untoward developments of the last few hours. Native-like, she was as a rule hard enough to interest in the sorrows of her European employers; but this matter happened to touch her nearly, and so caused her to take a very active interest in what was taking place, because she knew that her mistress's danger was to a certain extent her own. If Maude died—and she was unquestionably very ill—there was sure to be an inquiry into the circumstances, and she, in common with all who had been in attendance on the sick woman, would be called upon to explain why skilled aid had not been invoked. No amount of explanations or excuses would rid her of her share of the responsibility, and the blame attaching to her would very likely serve to seriously affect her future chances of employment among the Europeans. So as she sat and pondered over her unkindly fate, the one gleam of hope which served to lighten the prevailing gloom lay in Mukti Jan. She knew the gossip to be both clever and adroit, and (which was more to the point just then) not a little alarmed on her own account. She had no doubt that the woman would be able to devise some means of speedily communicating Maude's danger to her friends, and so putting an end to a situation which threatened to be fatal to them all.

But hour after hour passed, and neither was there any sign of improvement in the patient's condition,

nor did any one come near them. She noticed, though, that Maude seemed to be sleeping, and, though she was in a high fever, was somewhat quieter than she had been. For the rest, all was quiet within and without, and she began to think that the night must be far advanced from the stopping of all sounds of life outside, except the never-ceasing buzz of voices which came, more or less softened by the distance, from the busy thoroughfares of the great bazaar.

Tired out at last with watching and anxiety, and a little faint from want of food—for, since the morning, she had never stirred from her mistress's side—she rolled herself up in her blanket and lay down to sleep. When next she awoke, it was owing to the unbarring of the door, and as she hurriedly sat up to see who the intruders were, she discovered they were Mukti Jan and Mowlah Bux's mother, the latter bearing in her hand a lamp.

The first-named walked straight to the bedside, and looked at the sick woman. As she laid her hand on the sufferer's head, she shook her head.

"Well?" asked her companion.

"She is worse—far worse," replied the woman, who for reasons of her own would have much rather not told the truth, but who was too alarmed by Maude's condition to conceal the state she was in. "I do not like this at all."

The beldame brushed angrily past her to see for herself, and as she did so a quick look of intelligence passed between the others behind her back. The ayah asked a mute question, the gossip nodded,

and the former was satisfied that something had been done.

But there was no time for more. Just at this moment Maude moved uneasily and said something. The crone turned to the ayah to know what it was.

"What is she saying?" she asked.

"Nothing intelligible," replied the servant, with truth.

"Nonsense," retorted the other, staunch in her belief that Maude was shamming. "I heard her speak in her own language. What was it she said?"

"It was gibberish, I tell you," said the ayah. "She is out of her senses."

"It is you who talk gibberish, oh faithless one," cried the beldame angrily, with an indignant stamp of her foot. "You are all leagued together to defeat me, I know it. But you need not try. She is shamming, and I will soon bring her to her senses."

But the ayah, who a few hours earlier would never have dared to contradict the head of the zenana, was emboldened by the belief that aid was at hand.

"She is not shamming—she is very ill," she said.

"Would you screen her, pig that you are? Trust me to find a way to bring her senses back."

She turned towards the door, but Mukti Jan, who guessed her errand, caught her by the arm.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

"To call some of the others to help me, since you two will not."

"Stop, besotted one," said Mukti Jan firmly. "The ayah is right. This Englishwoman is very ill; there is my word for it, if you refuse to attend to hers."

"She has bribed you to pretend it. Let me go."

"I will not. You would kill her with your folly, for I repeat that she is far too ill to be used as you propose."

The old woman was getting furious at this opposition to her will.

"So much the better if I do," she retorted. "Then we shall all be rid of her and of the trouble she is causing."

"Vile one, would you murder her before our very eyes?"

"She will not die this time. *Arree*, outside there. Come to me some of you. I need help."

As she called, the door was flung open and half-a-dozen of the other women of the household came running in. Seeing which the ayah, conscious now that the aid on which she had set such store must be too late, cowered in a corner. Mukti Jan, more resolute and more authoritative, planted herself before the bed and waved them back.

"I forbid you to touch her—I, Mukti Jan," she cried. "To touch her now means certain death to this woman, and if the *Sahiblog* get to hear of it, it will go hard with all of you as well."

"Don't listen to her," screamed the old woman, "she is paid to say these things. Whom do you obey, me or her? Are you going to let this *kafir* leman, whom Mowlah Bux (being bewitched) has brought here to lord it over all of us, his proper people, to have the laugh of us all? Come, we will soon show her who is mistress here."

"Don't listen to this foolish old woman," cried

Surgeon Sahib knows where she is, and that she is ill. This time, at all events, he can attach no blame to me."

"But where are the rescuers?"

"The rescuers? Don't be a fool. Who at this time of night, and at the feast time too, could penetrate into the city on such an errand as that? Come, we had best be going. They will be too busy to take heed of us, so we can slip across the courtyard unobserved."

She adjusted her *burkah* as she spoke, and led the way. The ayah followed her, too dazed to think for herself just yet. So, crossing the two or three outer rooms, they reached the courtyard of the women's quarters, where the preparations for the intended tragedy were by this time in full swing.

A miserable place it was too, to be the sole means of exercise or recreation for such a number of human beings as it contained. An open space, some fifty feet by sixty, enclosed on every side by high walls, which, while they shut out the prying eyes of unauthorised men, at the same time cut off the inmates from anything approaching fresh air. And round this prison-yard were the dwellings, grimy kennels, ten to twelve feet square, each furnished with a rough native bed, a pipe, an earthenware water vessel, a brass pot, and a quilt or two. Not a thing to afford rational interest or amusement was to be seen in this minute prison-house, in which some of the inmates were destined to spend their lives from the day of their marriage, when they were transferred from some similar gaol, to the day when a kindly Providence should grant them a final release.

But just at that time the principal interest of the spot centred round the bed to which Maude Ashley had been bound, and which had been placed by the bearers in the middle of the court. And now the fiends were losing no time in commencing the operation of putting an end to what their merciless leader chose to term the "shamming" of the unfortunate girl.

The torture (for such it would prove to be in a minute or so) had already commenced by one of the women running up with a pitcher of cold water drawn from the well in the corner of the courtyard, and dashing it over the prostrate victim of their spite. The method is an old one, well known in the East, and was none the less efficacious because Maude was in a burning fever when they began. But the old crone, who, torch in hand, was directing the operations, wanted something more, and as she saw the water fly over the prisoner's body, drenching her to the skin, she called to the next comer to exercise more care.

"Over her head," she said. "Trickle it slowly from a little height. That is the best way of all."

The gossip had halted for a moment, drawn by some strange fascination, to watch the process of slowly doing poor Maude to death. But the ayah slipped past her, only intent upon making her escape. Mukti Jan had been right—no one had time to attend to *them*—and, unobserved, she gained the gateway leading to the outer building, and, with trembling hands, undid the door. Even as she fumbled with it, a strange sound struck upon her ear—strange, that is, in that place at that hour of the night—the sound of horses' feet clattering on the roadway outside the

house. Then, as she paused a moment to listen, the sound stopped, and she could hear the jingling of the accoutrements as some of the animals shook their heads. And then, a moment later, some one hammered on the outer door.

On the instant it flashed across her mind that this was indeed the promised succour for which she had looked. Not knowing that the house was for the time deserted by its men, she hesitated a moment before she moved. Then, as the knocking was repeated, she ran as fast as she could towards the outer door, and began to unbar it in its turn.

Before her task was finished a fresh incident occurred. The process of torturing poor Maude was just beginning to take effect. As the ayah began to remove the bar which closed the great door, there rose in the silence of the night shriek after shriek of the most blood-curdling kind, startling the woman as it did the men outside. Then, as she redoubled her efforts, the door was burst violently open from the outside, and some one fell inwards almost at her feet. Quickly recovering himself, Eustace, for it was he, ran off in the direction of the sounds, followed an instant later by Collard and Hewett in turn.

Guided by the cries of agony from within, the three Englishmen were in the courtyard in a trice. It would be hard to say which were the most astonished by each other's doings—the assailants or the assailed. But the latter, utterly unable to account for the appearance of the sahibs there, fled shrieking to the houses, all except the old beldame, who seemed rooted

to the ground by this unexpected development of events, and Mukti Jan, who had as yet been unable to carry into effect her intention of escaping, and to whom the newcomers appeared in any light except that of foes. There was enough light in the place for Eustace to see something, and to guess the rest. In an instant he had dropped beside the victim of these fiends' cruelty, and was busily engaged in loosening the ropes which bound her to the bed, and Collard and the policeman were not slow to follow suit. In a very brief space they had cut or untied the bonds, only to be confronted by a fresh difficulty. Poor Maude Ashley, beside herself with pain and fear, was quite incapable of discriminating between friend or foe, and she fought and struggled like the madwoman that, for the moment, she was. Seeing this, Collard cast his eye around, and speedily discovered a native quilt lying outside one of the rooms. With Eustace's assistance he managed to roll the unhappy woman in it, and so to neutralise her struggles for the time. Then, bidding Eustace, who had taken Maude up in his arms, follow as quickly as he could, he ran towards the door.

Meanwhile John Hewett had his hands full in another way. When first the three intruders burst so unexpectedly into the place of execution, the old beldame, who was directing operations, was so astonished by their sudden and most unaccountable appearance, that she was temporarily bereft of, not only the power of action, but of speech. To her the coming of the rescue party was all the more

unaccountable because, previous to commencing her schemes of vengeance, she had with her own hands closed and secured both the inner and the outer gates. Where these people came from was a mystery—how they gained admittance was even harder to imagine, and so, completely dumfounded by the turn events had taken, she had watched in speechless wonder the loosening of her victim's bonds. But as she saw what was going forward, and realised that here was the very rescue which she declared to be impossible but a short time before, she speedily recovered herself, and turning fiercely on John Hewett, the man next to her, assailed him with all the volubility of which her ready tongue was capable.

Mr. Hewett knew something of native methods of abuse, but even he was for the moment confounded by the wealth of vituperation at the old crone's command. Seeing this the beldame tried to rush past him, and so to get at Eustace, who was already carrying his prize towards the door. But that was just what John Hewett had no intention of letting her do. With his face to the enemy he retreated slowly towards the door, and, once he reached it, blocked her further way.

"Not quite so fast, old lady," he said, standing in the doorway, and keeping her at arms' length with his hunting crop, which he managed to manœuvre so as to hold her off without actually touching her. "I shall have to trouble you to wait a minute or two till the others are clear."

The hag's only answer was a fresh volley of abuse.

And at the same time Mukti Jan, to whom his voice and appearance were quite familiar, plucked her by the sleeve.

"Hush, *mai*, hush! It is the Police-Captain Sahib," she said.

The fury only redoubled her abuse on hearing this, but words could not move her adversary from his post, till presently, hearing Eustace's footsteps dying away behind him, he turned and retreated to the outer door.

All this time Wilmott had been standing in the alley peering into the darkness and wondering what it all meant. Then, as strange sounds were wafted in upon him, he recalled Hewett's warnings, and wondered if the time had come for him to act. But before his mind was made up, Collard sprang through the gateway and ran up to where he stood.

"Where is the dhooly?" asked the doctor, and then seeing it, he dropped on his knees beside it, and began to prepare it for its load. An instant later Eustace in turn appeared with something in his arms. And last came Hewett, as cool as if nothing was amiss, followed by an old crone of surpassing ugliness, as could be seen by the light of her own torch, who was pouring out her wrath in all the flowery hyperbole of the East.

"Be quiet, you beldame," said Hewett, as he closed the door behind him. "I'll get you *jail-khana* for this night's work, as sure as I stand here."

"Hewett, what on earth does this all mean?" asked Wilmott, finding his tongue at last.

"It means, in plain English," replied the policeman,

with a short laugh, "that the Assistant-Adjutant-General of the Khurruckpore Division, aided and abetted by the Civil-Surgeon and the District Superintendent of Police, has been committing burglary and larceny, and heaven knows what besides, in the house of a citizen of the town. And it may further interest you to learn that, should a like occasion arise again, one of the three, John Hewett to wit, would do as much a second time!"

CHAPTER XXXV

It was just as well that, if Wilmott was too bewildered to be of the slightest use, the others of the party kept their wits about them. For though this second abduction (for such was the carrying off of Maude Ashley from her husband's house) had been carried through by Eustace with firmness and skill, helped by a share of good luck, much yet remained to be done before they could consider themselves out of the wood. By the greatest good luck they had found the house deserted by its men, a bit of good fortune which they owed to Mowlah Bux's suspicion that the place was being watched, and to his morbid desire not to draw attention to it till the time was ripe for the proposed marriage. There had, therefore, been no one at home capable of opposing the intruders, though, as it was now getting very late, the latter could not count much longer on being left unmolested at their task. Moreover, the long halt, not to mention the screams, were calculated to arouse the curiosity of the troopers, and on every ground it was needful that they should hasten away. Good fortune had prevented so far all risk of a scuffle between Christian and Moslem, which might begin with a religious riot and end, heaven knew where.

"Come away, Wilmott, don't loiter here," said Hewett next. "I heard my name mentioned just now, so they have evidently recognised me, which will keep them quiet for a bit while we get clear away. Let us see if we can be of any use over yonder."

"What does it all mean?" asked Wilmott, helplessly bewildered still.

"You'll hear in good time, but come away now as I bid you." Saying which, he himself hastened to the dhooly, where he found the woman they had rescued, with the doctor kneeling beside her, and busily engaged in trying to restore her to consciousness.

"I don't know what to do," he said anxiously. "I think she has only fainted, but I dare not start till we get her round, for fear she might start screaming again before she finds out where she is, and so bring a hornet's nest about our ears."

"Time's precious, doctor," said Hewett. "Could we not, at all events, get her out of this?"

"A moment. I think she is coming to. There, Mrs. Ashley, you'll be better now."

For what seemed an age, though in fact it was only a minute or so, the four onlookers watched Maude coming slowly back to life. Then, to Collard's infinite relief, she opened her eyes.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"In good hands. Don't you know me, Mrs. Ashley?"

"Is it you, Dr. Collard? I have had such a terrible dream."

"Hush, you must not talk. Drink this, and lie down and try to sleep."

Quick as lightning, he drew a small phial from his

pocket and poured part of the contents into a glass which he held to her lips. She obeyed him to the letter, and as she lay back, as much from weakness as from anything else, he bade her keep quiet.

"Rest and try to sleep," he said. "Above all, don't speak, for our lives depend on your not being discovered. See, I will draw the curtains. You are quite safe now—we are all here. Now, Colonel, one minute more and I'll fetch the bearers, and then we can get under way."

And as he rose to his feet the Colonel turned to the commander of the party, his use for which was nearly done.

"Good," he said. "Now, Wilmott, please move off your men. And a thousand thanks—why, I'll explain to-morrow. Hewett, just ride with him, like a good fellow, and Collard and I will take charge of the dhooly. Where are the horses?"

Two minutes later they were all on their road again, first Wilmott and the policeman, then some sixty stout *Jât* troopers, and lastly the dhooly escorted by the pair of friends.

"Do you know whereabouts we are, Hewett?" asked Wilmott, as they started.

"Not the least. I was never here before, but I fancy we can't be far from the city wall, so just drive ahead and trust to luck."

"And can you tell me now what it all means?"

"It means that you have been a passive spectator at the rescue of an Englishwoman from the cruel clutches of a scoundrelly native, who had entrapped her into marrying him. And it further means that,

of four European officials who rode into this city together to-night, you are the only one whose billet is worth a rush if once a benevolent *Sircar* gets to know what has been done."

"I'd like to get to know myself," said Wilmott, "only you won't come to the point. I heard nothing except a squabble between you and Eustace, and some awful screams which sounded like a woman in pain."

"Don't remind me of them, though it was that very screaming which turned a sober policeman into a fellow who would have liked to wade up to his knees in native gore. What was the last thing you saw?"

"I saw Eustace send you spinning across the road and jump through a half-open door."

"Oh, you saw that? Well, I have forgiven his being a bit ready with his hands, knowing as I do now how much better he judged the crisis than I did. As soon as he vanished through the gateway with Collard after him, I went too. We ran down the entry and crossed an outer courtyard, into a more secluded one, led all the way by the screams. There was quite enough light for us to see what was going forward, and in the middle of a group of these native fiends we could clearly see an Englishwoman, whom they had strapped to a bedstead for the purpose of torturing at their leisure, under the superintendence of an old crone with white hair——"

"Excuse me, but was it the one who followed you to the gate?"

"Just so. Now, would you believe it possible that in the nineteenth century, in a country nominally under British rule, these brutes should dare to use

in such fashion one of us. Yet I give you my word they had her there, poor creature, bound and helpless, and were just beginning to torture her in cold blood when we arrived."

"How ghastly!"

"You would say so if you had heard the screams as near as I did. I need hardly add that it did not last long after that. Eustace's appearance scattered them at once like so many sheep, I suppose because they were so dumfounded to see an Englishman in the place, and in a trice Collard and I went to work with penknives at the ropes. When we did get her loose, the poor creature was so beside herself with terror that it was as much as we could do to hold her, and then she fainted, and Eustace caught her up and brought her out as you saw. I brought up the rear, and, I am afraid, got rid of a plaguey lot of strong language, for you see there were no men to thrash, and I was bound to let out some way."

"You were lucky, all of you, to get out with whole skins."

"We were. If what I had heard this evening, to the effect that this very Mowlah Bux was holding a sort of devils' parliament in his own house over this very woman, had been true, it would have taken more than you fellows to cut us out."

"It would have raised half the town on your tracks."

"I'll go one better, and add that we are not out of the wood even yet. I wish I knew where we are."

"I wish we were through, though what the dickens

Eustace meant by arranging this picnic for our benefit is beyond me altogether."

"He never did such a thing, and that is just where his artfulness came in. It was the Commissioner who asked for troops, and this scheme of Eustace's was an afterthought. He has succeeded pretty well. Do you suppose that there is one of your fellows who has the slightest notion of what has just occurred?"

"How could they, when I myself did not know?"

"Have they been asked to help?"

"No."

"And yet I suppose you see his little game?"

"To bring enough men with him to burn the place about their ears if he wanted to?"

"No. What the politicians would call moral force. He could point to your presence as an earnest of what he meant to do. And the only bad bit of luck he has had was my being recognised by an old hag, whom I threatened to run in once for malpractices at Collard's instigation. But for her, Mowlah Bux's zenana might have taken us for so many devils hurtling through the air, so utterly impossible did such a rescue seem by purely human means."

"You are right. And now all that is left is to get home as quickly as we can. I wish we knew where we are."

"What's that to our left?" asked Hewett, by way of reply. "Is it a pond?"

"Yes, it is."

"Then I know where we are. We've got out of the city by that hole they knocked in the wall the other day."

Even as he spoke, Eustace trotted up from the rear.

"Are we ever going to find a way out?" he asked.

"We *are* out, so Hewett says," replied Wilmott.

"Thank heaven! Then here we will part company, Wilmott. You had better take the shortest road back to your lines, and leave us to find our own way home. How far are we from the cantonment, Hewett?"

"Five miles—perhaps six, for we are on the wrong side of the city."

"That can't be helped; but if you will give me some idea of our nearest way, the doctor and I will see the dhooly home."

"A hundred yards or so from here you will find the circular road which skirts the city walls. That is your best—in fact, it is the only way."

"Thanks. Good night, Wilmott, and please don't talk about our night's work till you see me in the morning, when I shall be able to explain everything, I hope, to your satisfaction. And you, too, Hewett? I may rely on your discretion?"

"That you may, and on any further aid that I can give you. To begin with, I had better come with you and show you the way."

"I should be infinitely obliged if you would. I am most anxious to get our prize lodged for the night, and to miss our way now would be a misfortune indeed."

"The first to-night, Colonel," replied Hewett, with a laugh.

"Well, we had better get on," was Eustace's answer.

"Good night, Wilmott."

"Good night, sir. If it is as far as all that, I had

better trot, I think," and he gave the word to do so, and in a couple of minutes he and his men had disappeared down the road.

"I owe you an apology, Hewett," said Eustace, as soon as they were alone, "for handling you rather roughly just now."

"Don't mention it, Colonel. I dare say, if it comes to that, I ought to apologise too, for you certainly gauged the situation far better than I did. I only hope," he added gravely, "that such a thing as we saw to-night—those, those screams I mean, are an exceptional case, and that such atrocities don't often take place in the women's prison-houses of our great cities."

"I wish I thought it was," said Eustace; but he had no time for more, for Collard and the dhooly came up at the same moment.

It proved a long march—in fact, nearer seven miles than six—to Fairfax's bungalow; but they could not travel fast, and it was over an hour after the cavalry left them before at last the lights of the cantonment appeared in sight. Three or four times they had halted in order to enable Collard to look at his patient, but the report was always the same—she was sleeping soundly under the influence of the opiate which Collard had given her, and with which he had provided himself in case of need.

"At last," muttered Eustace to himself, as he rode up to the verandah and found his host and hostess and Mary Bainbridge awaiting their arrival.

"Well?" asked the Major.

"All's well. The dhooly is just behind."

Then as it came up he told the bearers to set it down inside the verandah, and dismissed them. The four gentlemen carried it to the room which had been prepared, and, having taken away the top and side curtains, left the doctor and the ladies to attend to the patient undisturbed.

"You two look as if you would be all the better for a 'peg' apiece," quoth the Major, as he led the way back to the dining-room. "Colonel, you are about used up, I fancy?"

"We both are," replied Eustace. "Help Hewett first, and let him get home to bed as fast as he can."

"No hurry," said the policeman. "I'd like to stop and hear it is all right."

"Then light a cheroot, make yourselves comfortable, and tell me all about it," suggested Fairfax.

So down they sat and smoked while Hewett, acting as spokesman, gave a short account of their four hours' work, saying little of his own share or the risk he had run, but enlarging generously on Eustace's pluck and skill, and the Major's face grew graver and graver as he listened, till at last he had a chance to put in a word.

"So far so good," he said; "but, unfortunately, it can't end here."

"I never supposed it would end here," replied Eustace, with a smile.

"You'll be lucky if it does not end your soldiering."

"That we must leave to time to decide for us," said the Colonel. "I myself have hopes."

"There is no hope for you if the affair gets wind. Government would never tolerate such interference on

the part of one of their servants, over whom they have a complete hold, in the domestic concerns of a native, and that is what it is, look at it how you may. What do you say, Hewett?"

"I'll tell you more to-morrow afternoon," replied the policeman. "I've a little scheme of my own, which, if it works, may be the salvation of us all."

"I hope it may; but, on the face of it, you all, Eustace in particular, have sinned beyond forgiveness."

"Perhaps," said the unrepentant Colonel. "But understand one thing clearly, I was the only mover and I take all the blame. And I tell you further that, given the same provocation, I would do it over again to-morrow."

"And so would you, Fairfax," put in Hewett, "if you had seen what we saw."

"Possibly, but I must remind you that it is not always because a thing is just in itself that its perpetrators get off scot free."

"A fine official word that 'perpetrators,'" said Eustace, with a laugh. "Smacks of a Court of Inquiry, with a G.G.'s resolution to follow. However, I alone am to blame, and I am prepared to take the risks."

"Well," said Hewett, rising, "to-night rings down the curtain on the first act—a very successful one—and it won't be my fault if the second does not go as well."

"Don't carry your head too high, old fellow," said the prudent Major.

"We are dealing with natives, not with Europeans," replied the other. "Well, I may have something to tell you to-morrow afternoon when I call to see how Mrs. Ashley is. Now I'd better get home, as it will be light in a couple of hours or so. Good night to you both."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

It required some persuasion to make Dr. Collard follow his friend's example and take himself off to bed. But being at last satisfied that there was nothing for him to do so long as the opiate continued to work, he, too, consented to retire, on the understanding that he was to be called if anything went amiss. Then and not till then, after seeing him off the premises, did Eustace and his host retire to their respective rooms, leaving Mrs. Fairfax and Mary Bainbridge to divide the duties of the sick room, which resulted in the latter pointing out that one could watch by the sleeping woman just as well as two, and sending the mistress of the house off to bed till such time as the patient should awake.

As it turned out, the opiate had been rather stronger than the doctor intended, though it did Maude no harm, in the end, by giving her a good long rest after the fatigues and excitements of the previous day. Indeed, the dose, primarily intended to make her travel quietly, and so stave off the chance of premature discovery before they were beyond the risk of pursuit, ended by helping to stave off worse consequences later on.

When the house party assembled for their late

breakfast about ten o'clock she was still sleeping peacefully, and Collard, who had called some time earlier, had bidden them let her alone. Hewett, too, had looked in about nine o'clock, but, so far, had nothing to report. In fact, for the time all was quiet, and they separated after it had been arranged that there should be a meeting of what may not inaptly be called the conspirators later in the afternoon, to report progress and discuss their future course of action. For they all had their business to attend to just as if nothing unusual was in the wind, and first among them it fell to Eustace's share, as soon as breakfast was over, to seek out Wilmott and explain to him the true meaning of the night raid in which he and his men had played an important, if unobtrusive, part.

His interview with the cavalry man was of a most satisfactory class. To begin with, he found that Wilmott had loyally played his part, and had kept their counsel so successfully that not a soul—not even his own men—had the smallest notion that anything out of the way had taken place during their last night's ride. They supposed, so Wilmott assured his senior, that the halt had been made for purposes of consultation among the officers, and though they had no explanation to offer for the phenomenon of the screams, the darkness and the crooked lane had quite concealed the actual business of Maude's abduction from the keenest-eyed among them. And now Wilmott in his turn was provoked to bitter wrath by what Eustace had to tell, and he not only volunteered to keep the matter a

secret in his own bosom, but offered his services at any future time they might be required.

But neither he, nor indeed Eustace himself, had any great hope that the story would remain a secret very long.

"It all turns on what that d——d *vakil* takes it into his head to do," he said; "the fate of every one of us lies in his hands."

"Hardly," said Eustace coolly. "Not your fate, or Collard's, or Hewett's, or even that of his unhappy wife herself. Remember this much, Wilmott, that I should never have attempted this plan, which has succeeded by a miracle (for Hewett tells me that it was the merest chance that we did not find the house, in place of its being garrisoned by a dozen or so of old women, crammed with desperadoes of Mowlah Bux's family), unless I had been certain that I could clear every soul of you except myself."

"It will be a big business if the papers get hold of it, as——"

"As they assuredly will," suggested Eustace, with a short laugh. "Well, if the worst comes to the worst, I shall not be the first man that has come to grief in India in a righteous cause, nor in all probability the last. I have this comfort, moreover, that, however much they may blame my rashness, of my motives they can say nothing unkind."

"No, indeed; and, having succeeded, you can afford to treat the rashness as a negligible quantity. But you must excuse me now, Colonel, as I have to get across to the lines. You may rely on me to keep your secret, and I, I hope, on you to keep me posted in what happens next?"

"You'll hear fast enough, I expect, without our telling you," replied Eustace, "unless Mr. Mowlah Bux takes his defeat much more quietly than I think he will. But, anyway, I'll keep you posted in what is going on."

And with a hearty hand-grip the pair separated, each to his separate concerns. For this is a big world, full of varied interests, which refuse to be shifted from their appointed course by the necessities of individuals, small or great. Men, women, and children come and go—paupers and princes are born, live their lives, and die—mighty empires, involving the welfare of millions, rise and fall—but still, ninety-nine hundredths of creation go their ways unmoved by more than the ruffle on the surface which is caused by an extra-sensational bit of news. And Eustace, when at length he reached his office, found the usual basketful of matters demanding his attention, and was forced, for an hour or two, to forget Maude Ashley and his own anxieties in what is called "the press of work."

Over in the Fairfaxes' bungalow everything was as quiet and silent as they could keep it. The Major, whose regimental work had been disposed of earlier in the morning, had stepped across to the mess to get himself out of the way; the servants had all retired to their houses in the compound; and even Mary Bainbridge had given place to Mrs. Fairfax, and laid her weary self down to rest, while her relief kept watch in the darkened chamber where their patient lay.

It was past two o'clock, and more than twelve

hours since she fell asleep, when at last Maude awoke, in a measure refreshed, but still conscious of a heaviness of head for which she was at a loss to account. She was growing accustomed to surprises, so that the fact that she was once again in new surroundings did not disconcert her so much as it might have done a few weeks before, and, delighted to find that this time everything she could see suggested English in contradistinction to native ways, she lost no time in idle conjectures, but called for her ayah.

Mrs. Fairfax heard her, and, coming swiftly to her side, completed her satisfaction by showing her, in place of one of the brown horrors to whom she was of late accustomed, the face of a fair young English girl of about her own age.

"Did you call?" asked Edith.

"I did. Where am I, and who are you?"

"You are among friends—at least, I hope you will let me call you so," replied Edith gently. "You are in our bungalow, Major Fairfax's, where Colonel Eustace is staying."

"And what has become of my ayah, and Mowlah Bux, and his mother, and the rest? The last thing that I remember was finding myself strapped to my bed, and see" (holding up her wrists) "that cannot have been imagination, for here are the scars made by the cords. How came I here?"

"Hush. You must not excite yourself. It will all be explained to you in good time, but at present you need only know that you are safe."

"Safe? Am I no longer in India then?"

"Oh yes, you are in India——"

"And how can I be safe from that wretch's malice, so long as I am within his reach?"

"Please, do not excite yourself," said Edith; "it is so bad for you, and the doctor said you were to be kept quiet. Be sure you are among friends who, all of them, will take care of you, and try to make up to you for all that you have suffered."

Maude's head was not very clear as yet, and all she caught of this last remark was the latter part.

"Yes — suffered — that is the word," she cried fiercely, for she was still a trifle light-headed. "But how can you know what I have suffered? Have you been deceived and ill-used, and carried off by force to a hateful native house, where you were at the mercy of a native beldame, who abused you and struck you, and finally tied you to a bed and tried to torture you? What does it all matter to you?"

"Oh, don't, please don't get so angry, Mrs. Ashley. I know we have all behaved very badly, and might have done so much to help you if we had tried. But there are some of us in Khurruckpore who mean to try to do better in future, we do indeed."

"I don't believe it. They have one and all been so cruel to me, and turned their backs on me as one not fit to live, and left me to die, when my only fault was that I had tried to do good, and had trusted the words of a scoundrel against the warnings of an honest man. You said Colonel Eustace was here," she added, breaking off suddenly. "Where is he now?"

"He has gone to his office, and will be here presently."

"He has left me in the hands of strangers, to die for all he cares——"

"Mrs. Ashley, that is most unfair, and you will be sorry some day for saying it. He risked his life last night to bring you here, and even now he is in the greatest danger for what he has done for you. If ever woman had a true friend in this world, Colonel Eustace has been that friend to you."

"I know it, I know it," sobbed poor Maude (who was really not responsible for what she was saying), wringing her hands piteously. "But if you had suffered as I have suffered, you would neither know nor care what you said. I have been so ill-used, so cruelly treated, that I have almost come to look upon everybody as my enemy, to think that all are leagued together to torture me to death. The best thing for me to do is to die, and so rid the world of an encumbrance of which it is tired, for which it has no further use."

"Mrs. Ashley, you must not say such things. I shall have to call in poor Mrs. Bainbridge who is lying down after being up with you all night."

"Is Mary Bainbridge here? Thank Heaven for that."

"Will you not believe me when I tell you that we are all here—Colonel Eustace, Dr. Collard, Mr. Hewett all, in fact, who wish you well. Come, you must not lose heart, now that the worst is over and happiness is coming back to you again. We have a deal to make up to you, I know, but you must let us try, and, as a first step, you must begin to take a brigh er view of things."

Maude Ashley's only answer was to burst into tears. The first words of kindness which she had received from one of her equals for so many weary weeks were altogether too much for her, weakened as she was by illness and suffering, and she felt as if her poor overburdened heart must break. She and happiness, or even peace, had been strangers for so long that she could hardly believe her troubles were ever to end. But Edith Fairfax's kindness of manner, even more than her words, was gradually breaking down the barrier raised by resentment of past treatment, and so she was able at last to indulge in all the luxury of a good cry.

Then her kind hostess stepped to the door, and ordered a servant to bring the patient something to eat. And while it was being prepared, she made Maude as comfortable as she could, and left her to recover in her own way, as she presently did when they brought her breakfast. A cup of tea did her head good, and she lay back with a sigh of contentment.

"You feel better now, don't you?" asked Edith.

"Much better."

"That is right. Now make yourself as comfortable as you can, and, if you feel equal to it, we can talk. Only you must promise me to tell me when you begin to feel tired, and I will leave you to go to sleep again."

But there was little chance of Maude's resting just then. She wanted to hear all about her rescue—how it was contrived, and by whom. And Edith told all she knew, and in doing so took the opportunity of pointing out that, now she had escaped from the bazaar,

she was beyond the reach of her husband's malice, and safe under the protection of her English friends.

"You must look upon it all as a bad dream, Mrs. Ashley," she said. "We are going to take care of you now, and see that it does not occur again."

But Maude refused to be comforted. There was one side of the subject which she could neither forget nor forgive.

"It is bad enough," she said; "horrible any way you look at it. But there is something in it which you don't know, which is so inexpressibly degrading that I hardly like to tell you."

"Then don't tell it," answered Edith kindly. "Not that it would make any difference to me. I felt last Sunday, when Colonel Eustace told me your story, how badly you wanted a friend, and how cruel we must all have seemed to you. I made up my mind, too, that if you would let me, I would try to do what I could to make up for my own share of the past."

"You are doing so already," said Maude. "Ah! if you only knew what it is to me to have some one like you to talk to——"

"Don't think of it," replied the other, kneeling beside her and passing her arms round her; "I don't like to hear you speak of it. I know we shall be friends."

"I hope so," said Maude sadly, "and if you knew all, you would say I needed all the support you could give. How cruelly I have been used, how bitterly deceived, no one as yet knows but myself. Come Mrs. Fairfax, I feel I ought to tell you, and leave you to deal with me as you will. What would those who

have spoken so harshly of my even marrying a native say if they knew that the wretch who tricked me into marrying him had already another wife?"

"Another wife!"

"Yes, a black wife of his own people, to whom he had been married for years past."

"And did he never tell you?"

"Need you ask? Should I have ever married him if he had?"

Edith thought for a minute before she answered. This new development made things so much worse than even they were before.

"It seems to me," she said presently, "that this quite absolves you from ever having anything to say to him again."

"That I have made up my mind to long ago," was Maude's answer. "But that is very little use. Can it give me back my wasted life, or wipe out the disgrace?"

"You must not speak of a wasted life. You are still quite young, and may have many years of happiness before you yet."

But Maude only shook her head.

"Too late," she said sadly. And then Mary Bainbridge, coming in to see who was talking, put an end to further conversation between the pair.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

OF all the actors in the little drama which had culminated in Maude Ashley's rescue, none was busier that day than was John Hewett. The truth was, that the honest Superintendent of Police was now a trifle inclined to blame himself for what he considered to be his own neglect of the case. It was quite certain that he would have found it extremely difficult—indeed, actually impossible—to do much more than he had done; but his overnight experiences had been such a revelation, Maude's escape so narrow, that he could not forgive himself for having let things go so far as they did without let or hindrance on his part. And his new contrition caused him to hunt about for some means of not only showing his sympathy with the victim, but of also securing her and her rescuers from the more than likely consequences of their actions, should any hint of these last get to the ears of those in authority. And now, remembering how Eustace had not scrupled to take advantage of his official position to put himself in a favourable situation to act, John Hewett, in his turn, determined that he would try whether the District Superintendent of Police of Khurruckpore was not more than a match for any

native in the place. He knew the character of the man with whom he had to deal, and he thought that a little "bounce," coupled with the weight of his official position, would more than suffice for Mowlah Bux & Co.

It will be easily understood that a man in Hewett's place needed to know the twists and turns of the native character to a nicety. The policeman very speedily arrived at the conclusion that, in this private effort of his, two things were likely to stand him in good stead, namely, Mowlah Bux's wholesome dread of the English law, and his respect for the customs of his own country. These two very opposite forces could be judiciously combined in bringing pressure to bear upon him, and that was just what Hewett meant to do. However little the English law might be able to effect in the way of protecting the native *zenanis*, its long arm would stretch far and grip hard in the case of one of its own daughters. Maude Ashley was an Englishwoman, and if she claimed the protection of the law, the mere fact of her being also Mrs. Mowlah Bux would stand for naught. That was aid number one. The other was widely different, but none the less efficacious. It is an undeniable fact, however much the English officials regret it, that the natives have the strongest objection to anything of the nature of an investigation of their domestic arrangements by the police, and Mowlah Bux, who aped his betters, knew that an invasion of his *zenana* by the myrmidons of the law would carry personal disgrace in its train. And fortunately for Hewett's scheme, there was plenty to justify his ordering an

inquiry into what had been passing at Mowlah Bux's house during the few previous days. Armed with this double-headed engine of coercion, the policeman felt tolerably confident of success, and his first act on rising that morning was to send for Inspector Beera Singh, who speedily made his appearance.

"Go to the city," were his orders, "and find out what Mowlah Bux was doing last night; and when you have ascertained for certain, seek him out, tell him I shall be glad to see him in the course of the morning, and then come straight back to me with your report."

This done, he got out his horse and cantered across to ask after Maude. Then came breakfast, and at his usual time he was in his place in court. About eleven o'clock his messenger returned. Mowlah Bux had been at a gathering in honour of the festival at the house of his kinsman, Abdullah Khan, till three o'clock. He would wait upon the Police-Captain Sahib at two o'clock.

Punctual to the minute, Mowlah Bux made his appearance, and the two actors in the little comedy which was going to put an end to Colonel Eustace's danger stood face to face. It was part of Hewett's plan that he should open the attack.

"I've sent for you, Mowlah Bux, to tell you that I have found your wife."

He had scored the first point. Mowlah Bux's start of surprise at this totally unexpected opening was almost ludicrous, so disconcerted did he seem.

"Where is she?" he stammered.

"At Major Fairfax's bungalow in the Native Infantry Lines."

"How comes she to be there?"

"She went there, I suppose, like anybody else. I thought that you would like to know, as you had complained to me the other night—that she had vanished."

"Oh yes," said the *vakil* doubtfully. "Is that all?"

"Yes, so far as I am concerned. What more do you want?"

"Sahib, I have a complaint to make."

"Fire away," replied Hewett, outwardly calm, while, at the same time, his inward comment was, "Here it is, sure enough."

"Last night, while I and all the men of my family were away, certain armed soldiers broke in and ill-treated the women of my zenana."

"Take care what you say, Mowlah Bux. This is a very serious matter, and you must be sure of your facts. How do you know that they were soldiers?"

"Because," retorted Mowlah Bux, looking him steadily in the face, "only soldiers would do such a thing. The better class Europeans would be aware of the consequences of such an act."

"Oh, they were Europeans, were they? How many, pray?"

"Eight or ten men, so I understand; but my mother, who was badly beaten by them, is too ill to explain aright."

"And when did this happen?"

"About midnight."

"Did they do any other damage?"

"They broke in the gate."

"Did they take anything away?"

Here Mowlah Bux hesitated, his pride struggling with the wish for revenge.

"No. But——"

"Well?"

"One of my *zenanis*, a *purdah nashin* too, who should never go outside the *zenana*, has since disappeared. We suppose that she escaped in the confusion."

"Is that all? Well, what do you want me to do?"

"I want justice."

"I suppose you have no idea who these soldiers were?"

"How should I know them?"

"True. Well, you wish me to investigate the case for you?"

"Yes," with some hesitation, "I think so."

"You had better be sure, as you can't draw back afterwards. Yes or no?"

This time the hesitation was more pronounced still.

"Yes," he said at last.

"All right," replied Hewett cheerfully. "I will send over Beera Singh and a sergeant to see what they can make of it. I may as well tell you that I should have had to look you up in any case, as I have a report about your house this morning."

"What report?" with a start.

"I am informed that, about midnight last night, screams, as of a woman in pain, were heard coming from your house, which we have been watching ever since you told us of your wife's disappearance."

"Women often scream when they are angry."

"Or when they are tortured, Mowlah Bux. You

see it is lucky for you that your wife has turned up again, or we might, in fact I think we should, have assumed that it was her. Anyway, what you have told me about this other woman's disappearance, coupled with those screams, will make it my duty to get to the bottom of the business, if I can."

And to his great relief he saw that the threat had done its work. Mowlah Bux's face was a study as he cried, "You shall not do this thing. I will not have my house overrun by your police."

"It most assuredly will be," replied Hewett coolly.

"Even if I withdraw the charge?"

"That has nothing to do with it. I mean to get to the bottom of those screams."

"Sahib, this would disgrace my mother and all my female relations."

"It will teach them to be more careful in future, Mowlah Bux."

"Sahib, I ask you not to do this thing."

"Justice is justice, my good man."

"Come, let us be open. Confess that it is my wife who is urging you to do this thing."

"She has never made any suggestion of the sort. It is my duty."

"She is a bad woman," cried Mowlah Bux, now fairly brought to his knees by this threat of disgrace.

"Sahib, I will do anything; I will even forgive her all the evil that she has done to me and mine."

Then Hewett felt that victory was in his grasp. He saw the man was ready to do anything to come to terms.

"Mowlah Bux," he asked firmly, "do you mean to give up the game?"

"I do not understand you."

"I thought I had quickened your wits. Listen. If you want to make this complaint, sit down to that table and do so in writing. If you would rather not, say so."

"Oh, I don't want to make any complaint."

"Then," remarked Hewett, looking at him steadily, "the only other course open to you is to withdraw it in writing instead."

But this cool proposal staggered even the half-demented Mowlah Bux.

"Withdraw a complaint I have never made?" he gasped.

"Precisely. It is always my rule to get everything in writing."

"Sahib, this is absurd. You are jesting."

"I never was more serious in my life. You know the alternative."

"What?"

"I shall act on your verbal statement, and if I have to make hay of your premises in doing so, that will be your fault, not mine."

"I shall complain to Government."

"Do so, by all means. They will only call upon me⁴ to report."

"Sahib, you would disgrace me."

"That rests entirely with yourself. Come, you are wasting my time. Choose."

"What must I write?"

"Well, as you are a respectable man, and have had

an English education, I will let you down easily. Write me a letter which I will dictate."

For a moment his adversary hesitated, but he was too thoroughly cowed to hold out long. He sat down to the table and took up a sheet of paper.

"No, no," said Hewett, cool as ever, "that one won't do; it has the Government crest on it. There's a plain sheet beside it. Now, write":

(Mowlah Bux took up his pen.)

"Dear Mr. Hewett,

"I find on further inquiry that there has been a mistake. My mother confesses that she invented the story about the soldiers, to shift from her own shoulders the blame of the *zenani's* escape. I hear, too, that this woman has gone to her own village, and is with her friends. This explains everything, so please take no further steps.'

"Now, sign it, and address an envelope to me. Thank you."

And then, to give a further air of reality to this precious missive, he carefully closed the envelope for the sole purpose of opening it again.

"Very well, *Vakil Jee*," he said, as Mowlah Bux rose from his seat, "your request is granted, and I will take no further steps. By the way, I was nearly forgetting that Miss Ashley wants her baggage. When can you send it over?"

But this was too much even for cowed Mowlah Bux.

"How dare you?" he asked furiously, "when you know as well as I do who it was that abducted my——"

"Steady, sir, steady," replied Hewett, tapping the pocket in which he had placed the letter, "you forget that you have just written to me that there was no abduction, except, of course, your own carrying off of your wife by force to the bazaar."

Fairly foaming at the mouth, the *vakil* turned towards the door. Hewett put his foot against it.

"Wait a minute, you scoundrel," he cried; "you have something else to hear before you go. Once for all, understand that I will have no further molestation of this unhappy lady you tricked into marrying you. I've got enough against you one way or another to exhaust half the clauses in the Indian Penal Code, and if you so much as wink, across the black water you shall go again, at Government expense this time."

Wherewith he opened the door, and Mowlah Bux rushed madly out, the last vestiges of his European veneer gone for good. But when, some hours later, Hewett was shaking hands with Mrs. Fairfax, the first thing that kind little lady said was—

"Miss Ashley was very particular that I should thank you for sending her back her things."

Which lifted a weight of self-inflicted reproach from the honest policeman's mind.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

It was no part of John Hewett's plan to tell the others what he had done. He was a prudent man, who understood that there are some things which are best kept quiet, and he fully recognised that once the story of his interview with Mowlah Bux got about (as it most assuredly would, if he let it out of his own safe keeping), three parts of the hold he had over the slippery *vakil* would be gone. He merely told the Colonel that he might set his mind at rest—there would be nothing further heard of their midnight raid. Why or wherefore, he explained, was his secret, with which he did not mean to part.

But on one point there was no room for doubt. Mowlah Bux meant to keep his bargain, whatever were the reasons which induced him to forego the vengeance which, if he had only the courage to move, lay ready to his hand. The party in cantonments, who were anxiously watching for the first sign of trouble from his direction, saw day after day pass by without the expected complaint, and when first a week, and then a fortnight passed, and Mowlah Bux made no sign, they came at length to understand that, whatever the means had been by which he was dis-

armed, Mowlah Bux had no intention of avenging the affront they had put upon him, and that Hewett's assurance that they had heard the last of it was being justified in the event.

It was quite true that Mowlah Bux had had enough. His English wife had brought him nothing but trouble and disgrace, and having once got into his head the notion that he was well rid of her, he, for the first time in his life, took a decided stand, and satisfied his mother that on this point at all events he meant to have his own way. He managed, moreover, to frighten the old lady to some purpose by his pictures of what might be her own punishment for her share in the affair, and then, having given it out among his own relations and friends that he had divorced his wife for her misconduct, availed himself of the easy Mohammedan law to formally annul a connection which all agreed had been irregular from the first.

But though the worthy District Superintendent of Police had thus succeeded in relieving his co-conspirators of apprehensions on the score of possible vengeance from the shifty *valkil*, Maude's rescue was not destined to be the success they all had hoped to make it. They had freed her from the clutches of her native husband and his family, but it was beyond their power to undo the mischief which her unhappy marriage had wrought on herself. The first flicker of improvement which she had shown after her rescue soon died away, to be succeeded by a reaction which caused Collard (who was still attending her) to look very grave. It was all very well for them to pretend that the worst was over, that all that remained was

for her to get up her strength preparatory to returning home to England whither it had been settled she was to go as soon as she was able; but as the days slipped away and no change appeared, it became evident that she was not going to escape so easily as they had hoped. Everything was against her from the very first, and from the day when she set foot in Bombay she had had to contend with a series of misfortunes, which, following in quick succession, had by their cumulative force ended by transforming her in the course of a few months from a strong, healthy English girl into a broken-down, world-weary invalid. The actual cause was hard to fix definitely—it was rather a case of an accumulation of evils which had brought about her now complete collapse. She had passed through so many trials, mental and physical, that Collard did not wonder at the result. Among the least were her attack of enteric fever, Mowlah Bux's cruelty, and the savage treatment which she had received at his mother's hands, all of them aggravated by her not being properly acclimatised to the land of her adoption. But while he was far from under-rating the effect of these, Collard was even more anxious regarding the effect which the last few months' experiences might have on her mind. It was the knowledge of her failure which he dreaded, her awakening to the true understanding of what marriage to a native meant, her introduction to the women whom she had pictured to herself as burning for an emancipation to which she was herself to show the way—in a word, her too complete disillusionment in the matter of her ambitions and her hopes.

And he was right, as time very speedily showed. Maude Ashley was completely broken down, in mind and body as well. To her the world had lost its brightness—the brilliant opening of her life had receded into the background and left no future in its stead. She was, in her own opinion, a hopeless failure, one of whom the world, which she had meant to benefit by her talents, would well be rid. Nothing that the kind friends who surrounded her could say or do was able to shake the conviction that her star had set for ever, that the sooner the end came the better it would be for all concerned. For the simple fact was this—that this fair girl, once so proud, so ambitious, so self-confident, was dying of a broken heart, overwhelmed by a sense of her miserable failure, overweighted by the task her education had imposed upon her, crushed by the shocking position into which she had walked blindfold—a position of which the most degrading feature was that she, who had looked forward to being a native reformer's helpmate, an angel bearing tidings of better things to her unhappy sisters in her husband's native land, was in fact but an item in a household conducted on lines which her religion told her to be wicked, her modesty to be a disgrace to herself.

Kind friends gathered round her, kind hands ministered to her slightest wants. . . And if sympathy and regret for past uncharitableness could have healed her broken heart, Khurruckpore society would have done its best to furnish them. The very women who had been loudest in their scorn for the social outcast's action were now foremost in their rejoicings over this brand snatched from the burning, most vehement in

their denunciations of the husband who had brought her to this pass. But their tardy repentance came too late. Maude could not even see them when they came crowding to ask after her—was, in fact, too ill to stand the excitement, too heart-broken to be able to face any but the little coterie of faithful friends who had stood by her in her direst need. She gave her indifferent health as the excuse for turning them away from the door, but Collard and Edith Fairfax saw with sad misgivings that it was far worse than that—that her refusal to see any strangers meant that she had ceased to care for the opinion of a world which interested her no more.

Those whom she would see, the few who had rallied to her in the hour of her trouble, did their best to rouse her to a little interest in what was going on in the outer world, but tried in vain. These few faithful friends were always ready at her beck and call whenever she asked for them—her kind host and hostess, good Mary Bainbridge (who, being mindful of another time when her patient had talked and thought of nothing but a happy future which should atone for her mistake, was, perhaps, the saddest of them all), Eustace, Collard, Hewett, and the latter's wife, who was now returned from the hills, and ready and willing to take her share in the good work. And by the doctor's directions, when they came to see her they did their best to distract her thoughts from her troubles, and fix them on her approaching return to her childhood's home. For a time they seemed to succeed, and caused Collard, who knew that the only hope of saving his patient and restoring her to health

lay in getting her to throw off the gloom that hung over her like a shroud, and take a brighter view of things, to hope that even yet he might succeed. But he was soon undeceived by Maude herself.

It happened one afternoon, about two months after her rescue from the native city of Khurruckpore. He was still, of course, constant in his attendance, watching his patient's progress from day to day. After the manner of many who are slowly but surely fading out of an existence which has used them none too well, Maude had her good days and her bad ones, and it was on one of the former that she dashed the kind little doctor's hopes. She seemed so much better that he could not help congratulating her on the improvement she had made.

"Come, Mrs. Ashley," he said, "this is capital. If you go on at this rate, we shall be sending you on from Khurruckpore in less than no time."

Maude looked at him with a look that seemed to pierce him through and through.

"You know you do not mean it," she said gravely, but without a tinge of sorrow in her voice. "I shall never leave Khurruckpore again, and so I wrote to tell my mother yesterday."

"Come, come," he faltered, without daring to look her in the face. "You must not say such things, nor even think them. It is your own self which is keeping back your restoration to health. If you would only look a little at the bright side of things, we should have you about in no time at all."

"My life is done," she answered. "Further, I have no wish to live."

And Collard knew that she meant every word she said. As he was leaving the bungalow that afternoon, Edith Fairfax, who had not been present at the moment when Maude told him what was in her mind, came after him to put a question on her own account.

"Is Maude better to-day?" she asked.

"No," said the doctor shortly. "She is not."

"She is a very long time ill," said Edith thoughtfully.

"I fear you are tiring of so much trouble, Mrs. Fairfax——"

"No, no, please don't think that. It is a great pleasure to us, to me particularly, to have her here, and to know that she is as well taken care of as we are able. But, Dr. Collard, she is very long taking a turn?"

"She is," he said, and something in his manner made the kind little lady ask another question.

"Will she ever be better?"

"Never in this world, I fear," he answered solemnly. "She is dying of something not in the medical books, the hardest disease of all to cure—a broken heart."

"Will it be long?" asked Edith, turning towards him a tear-stained face.

"I cannot say. I can only tell you she is dying slowly but surely. The end no man can foresee."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AND so Maude Ashley drifted down the stream which was slowly but surely bearing her away. It was not so much with her a case of mere physical decay, though her once strong constitution was now sadly shattered by the trials and troubles that she had gone through, as a none-the-less deadly sapping of her interest in life, which was killing her. The very success of her early career had made the reaction more fatal, and now she was dying, young in years, and only on the threshold of what should have been a happy life, killed by a man's ill-usage and by the downfall of her hopes. The end did not come suddenly—indeed, she lingered far longer than the doctor and her friends had expected, or than her extreme weakness appeared to warrant. The cold weather came and the year drew to its close, and found her still alive, but the shadow of her old self, a quiet, subdued, heart-broken woman, waiting patiently for that death which she had come to look upon as the best, the only remedy for her ills. And as, day by day, her friends gathered round her, and did their best to cheer and encourage her, to them and to her the change was so gradual that at times it was hard to

realise that she was really weaker than the day before.

To one man, at least, of those who watched beside the dying woman, those were days of untold passionate regret. Of them all, Eustace alone had known her in the days of her strength and her pride, and to him, for this reason, the change was far more terrible than to any of the rest. And, moreover, his regrets, poignant enough already, were tinged with self-accusation for his own shortcomings in the past, which, by dint of brooding over them, made his conduct appear only a shade less black than that of Mowlah Bux himself. He told himself again and again that it was his own criminal selfishness which had brought the woman he had learned too late to love to this dread pass—his hesitation, at a critical moment, which had been the means of blighting her life, and of bringing her to an early grave.

Now that it was useless to think of it, he would gladly have given up all he possessed to save her—would have willingly resigned fame and career, if thereby he could have benefited her in the least. Her pride in her own cleverness, her wilful disregard of all advice, even her treatment of his cousin, were forgotten, and by the glorifying process which accompanies such latter-day martyrdom as hers, she had become in his eyes only a broken, suffering woman, whose failure was due quite as much to her own noble ambitions as to the hopelessness of one weak mortal trying to bend the world to her will.

Of course, he was wrong throughout. He had no assurance that, even if he had asked her to marry

him that day in Bombay, she, whose heart had so far not been touched by love for any other man, would for his sake have turned aside from her appointed course. But though most people, judging only by what appeared on the surface, would have dubbed her a heartless, selfish woman, bent only on her own ends, and taking no heed of the pain she caused to others whose misfortune it was to cross her path, Eustace's generous nature led him to look a little deeper, to try to find excuses for all that she had done. He could afford to view her eccentricities with indulgence, and make the best of her unquestionably large-minded aims.

To him she was no longer the reckless enthusiast who had tried to run a tilt against institutions too deeply rooted in bygone ages to yield to any puny efforts of hers, but a woman who had set before herself a high ideal, and who had failed, more because her chosen weapons had turned against herself, than from any demerits of her own.

The hardest part of his trial was the necessity for keeping his real feelings hidden from the others, and most of all from Maude herself. And as day after day he paid his visit (he had long since left the Fairfaxes' bungalow and moved into other quarters elsewhere), he had the double agony of seeing the woman he loved dying by inches before his eyes, and of knowing that she was passing away ignorant of the wealth of affection he had lavished on her, an affection unrequited on her part, and not to be spoken of between two people who were hopelessly divided by her own marriage to the callous and neglectful Mowlah Bux.

To his share, too, fell the necessary duty of communicating with her poor mother in England, and with John Strachey as well, though, perhaps, in his letters to the latter—letters which unconsciously laid bare the innermost secrets of his heart—he was able to relieve his feelings in a way which told his cousin plainly the true state of affairs.

And so the year wore on, and still the sick woman lingered, willing and anxious, but unable, to die. And it chanced that the time came for Eustace to once again restore his office into the hands of the brother officer for whom he had been officiating, and take his own departure, to return to his permanent appointment on the Headquarter Staff. His going was a grief to all of them, so thoroughly had he been the life and moving spirit of the little coterie which had gathered round Maude Ashley in these the days of her decline. They felt as if his departure must be the signal for the coming, but none the less dreaded, 'end. Still, his going was inevitable. The world, as has been remarked often enough, stands still for the convenience of no individual among us. Eustace was required elsewhere, and the day arrived when he was forced, sorely against his will, to turn his back on Khurruckpore.

His adieus were paid, his duties handed over, his arrangements all made to leave by the evening mail, and just as the shadows of night were falling, for it was now December and the days were short, he drove up to the Fairfaxes' bungalow, and was shown into the drawing-room, whither Edith speedily came to receive him.

"I am glad you have come," she said. "Maude has been asking for you more than once. She seems sadly restless to-night. I think your going has upset her."

"I wish I could have stayed," he began——

"Oh, she quite understands that that is impossible. When do you start?"

"My baggage is at the station now. Collard is to call for me here, and drive me down."

"So this is really your last good-bye?"

She stopped. The word just then had such an ominous sound.

"The last and hardest," he answered gravely. "I dread saying good-bye to Miss Ashley more than I can tell, because we shall both of us know that it is, in all human probability, the last time we shall ever meet."

"Yes. She, too, knows it, and she said as much to me just now. And then you are her oldest friend?"

"No, hardly that—her oldest here in India, and a link with her happier past. Am I to see her now?"

"Yes, please come at once. George will be back from the club before you go. But have you dined?"

"Thanks, I have had all that I require."

"Then come and see Maude," she answered, and led the way.

It was only natural that, at this the last meeting of the pair who had been through so many vicissitudes together, Eustace should in his own mind contrast the present with their first meeting in London less than a year before. Then, in her happy English home, the girl had seemed so full of life, and strength, and hope. And now? As he glanced at the poor wasted shadow

of her former self which lay there eagerly awaiting his coming, so weak that she had to be propped up by pillows on her couch, he could not help remembering his first opinions of her in those early days when he had been wont to pass her by with the remark that she was not his style, that a woman like her was not one to make any man a satisfactory wife, John Strachey least of all. Time had wrought changes in him as well as in her, for never yet had she seemed fairer or more lovable in his eyes than now when she and he were at the parting of their ways.

She welcomed him with a pathetic smile.

"I am so glad that you have come," she said. "I was beginning to fear that you meant to run away without coming to say good-bye."

"I should never have dreamed of doing such a thing," he answered, struggling with the emotion which threatened to master him. "If I had had to neglect every other soul in Khurruckpore, I should never have left without saying good-bye to you."

Mary Bainbridge, who had been sitting beside the sick woman, busy with her sewing as usual, rose quietly as he spoke and left the room. Then almost immediately afterwards Edith made some excuse and followed her example, leaving the pair for the last time together alone.

At first they chatted quietly, speaking of Eustace's future movements, and of the sad necessity for his going at all. But presently, as if recollecting that time was short, Maude changed the subject to the one on which she was most anxious to speak.

"I asked the others to leave us alone," she said,

"because I could not before them say to you quite all I wished. First, Colonel Eustace, I wanted to ask you to be the bearer of a message for me. I wanted you to tell Jack how heavily I have been punished for all the unkindness—I can see now that it was nothing else—I showed him. I am sure that, when he hears all he will pity and forgive me too."

"He has forgiven you long ago," replied Eustace. "I wrote months ago to tell him everything, and I wish now I had his answer with me to show you, but it is in my desk."

"Then I have to thank you for another kindness. Well, give him my message, and say that I learned his worth too late, when the fruits of my own obstinacy had opened my eyes to much that I did not understand before. And now for the rest of what I have to say. Heaven has been very kind to me, Colonel Eustace, for, in spite of my own follies and of all that I have done to disgust people, it has left me the affection and the friendship of those I value most. And now one word about yourself. I cannot thank you as I should for all that you have done for me, I will not even try——"

"No, please do not," he said.

"But I will just say this, that I feel that but for you I might now be enduring untold miseries in that dreadful place. I owe it to you that I can die in peace among my own people, surrounded by those who understand me and——"

"Oh, don't, don't," he cried, his regrets mastering him for the moment; "if you only knew how I blame myself, how——"

"Blame yourself? What for?"

"For everything that has taken place since I left you that day in Bombay."

"Why?" she asked in surprise, for even then her eyes were not opened to the truth. "What could you do you did not do, or say that you left unsaid? You did your best to stop me; more you could not have done."

"I could," he answered, his voice broken with the sorrow which was consuming his heart. "There was yet one other way which might have succeeded, but in the selfishness of my heart I let it go untried."

He stopped and turned away, and silence for the moment settled on them both. But presently it was broken by the dying woman's voice.

"I think I understand what you mean," she said, "and I thank you for it. Selfish as it seems to say so, I am glad it should be so. But don't let this be the last memory you have of me when I am gone. Think only that your kindness, your honest, ungrudging friendship, when all the rest turned their backs upon me, has been to me what no one, not even you, can guess."

Again there was silence for a minute or so, and again it was Maude who spoke.

"I hate to send you away," she said, "but I am very weak and tire easily. I dare not keep you longer, and this must be good-bye. If you think of me at all in the time to come, let it be as of a woman who had played her part in life and was glad to go. Don't," she added with a sudden burst of tenderness, "let your recollections of one who has valued you beyond

words be clouded by useless thoughts of things that might have been. Good-bye."

She held out her hand to him and he raised it to his lips.

"Good-bye ; God bless you," he said unsteadily, and turned to leave the room.

"Good-bye," she answered gently, "and remember always, while I am spared my thoughts will be of you, and of your kindness to one who needed it as sorely as ever woman did yet."

The last vision Eustace ever had of Maude Ashley was of a woman on whose face there was a happy smile, happier than any he had seen there before, and so he said good-bye.

Outside, Edith Fairfax was waiting to tell him that Collard had been there ten minutes, and was anxious about their catching the train. Eustace hastily wrung her by the hand, and then in turn said good-bye to Mary Bainbridge and the Major.

"I need not tell you to take care of your patient," he said to the former, as he ran hastily out into the verandah and jumped into the trap.

"We shall barely do it," said Collard, as he put his horse along at the best pace of which he was capable.

But they caught the train all right, and there was even time for Eustace to have a word at parting with his own and Maude Ashley's staunch friend.

"Good-bye, Collard, and a thousand thanks for all that you have done for me and for her. Take care of her to the end, and let me know from time to time how things go on."

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There was little need for Eustace's parting request to his friend. When, two days later, he reached his destination, he found a telegram waiting for him to tell him that Maude Ashley died the same night that he left Khurruckpore.

THE END.

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